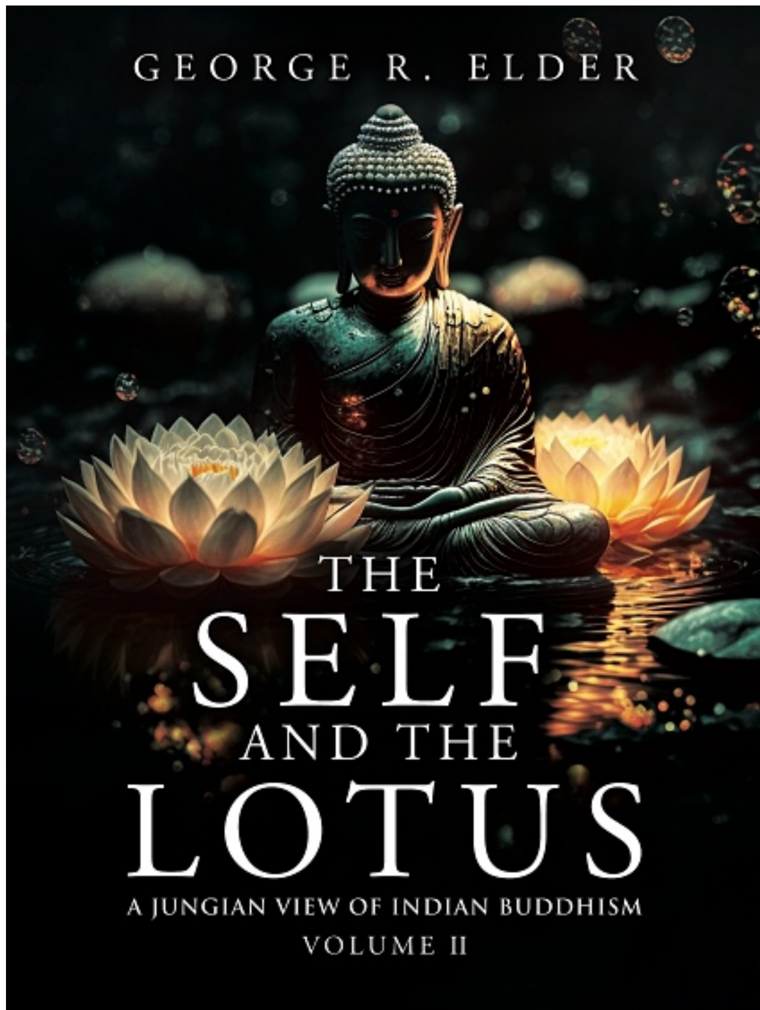

This is a survey of the religion of Buddhism as it developed in India millennia ago, before its success elsewhere in Asia. At important junctures, the author pauses to reflect from a Jungian perspective, to find meaning for us today.

The Self and the Lotus:
A Jungian View of Indian Buddhism, Volume II
By George R. Elder

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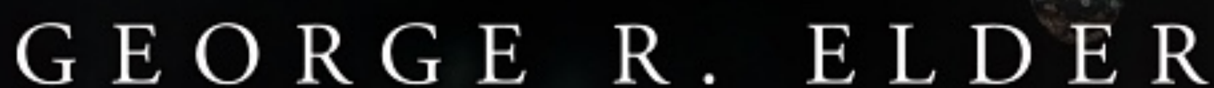

THE SELF AND THE LOTUS

A JUNGIAN VIEW OF INDIAN BUDDHISM

VOLUME II

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PRONUNCIATION GUIDE

The following list of terms is an informal guide to pronouncing Sanskrit. They have been selected to demonstrate the use of diacritical marks when transliterating into English.

ātman (OUGHT-muhn) self
āsrava (AAH-sruh-vuh) inflow, outflow

bhikṣu/nī (BICK-shoo/NEE) monk/nun
buddha (rhymes with COULD-uh) awake

cakra (CHUCK-ruh) wheel, tantric circle
citta (CHIT-uh) thought

deva (DAY-vuh) deity, god
devī (day-VEE) goddess
dhyāna (dih-YAWN-uh) trance
duḥkha (rhymes with hookah) suffering

jñāna (gin-YAWN-uh) knowledge

kāya (KYE-yuh) body
kleśa (CLAY-shuh) defilement

manas (muh-nuhs) mind

pāramitā (par-um-ee-TAAH) perfection
prajñā (pruh-gin-YAAH) wisdom
prapañca (pruh-PUNCH-uh) proliferation

ṛddhi (RID-ee) supernatural power

saṃgha (SUNG-uh) congregation
sukha (rhymes with hookah) happiness, bliss
śūnya/tā (SHOON-yuh/TAAH) empty/emptiness

tathāgata (tuh-TAAH-guh-tuh) thus come, thus gone
tṛṣṇā (trish-NAAH) craving

upāya (oo-PIE-uh) means, strategy

Chapter 12
"GREAT VEHICLE" (CONTINUED)

"Lotus Sūtra"

Studying Buddhism, even just Indian Buddhism, is quite different from studying a major Western religion because the canon of scriptures is so large. The Early Buddhist canon requires several large volumes, while the Mahāyāna collection of scriptures is actually vast. A standard Chinese Buddhist canon, for example, runs to a hundred volumes of a thousand pages each. Thus, Paul Harrison writes:

> Even when it was fully extant, it is unlikely that many Buddhists ever knew their canon in its entirety, as a Muslim might know the Qur'an or a Christian the Bible. The Buddhist scriptures are simply too extensive, so that most members of the order would have been familiar with and used only a small number of them, a functional partial canon as opposed to an ideal complete one.[1]

As a consequence, modern scholarship itself has focused on a "functional partial canon" of Buddhist materials—distorting the total picture, whatever that may be.

This is not just because the Buddhists did so but because doing otherwise has been technically difficult. Much of what is included as Mahāyāna has yet to be edited accurately, then translated accurately. A Sanskrit text may no longer exist and be available only in an early Chinese or Tibetan translation—raising questions of fidelity to the original. It is also true that the "cult of the book"—with its focus on a particular text—made it not quite necessary to know many other scriptures than what one worshipped, recited, copied. With all that in mind, let us now look at three scriptures that have received a great deal of attention by Buddhists and modern writers.

From a very early date, the *Saddharma-puṇḍarīka Sūtra* ("*Lotus Sūtra*," for short) became a focus for the study of Mahāyāna Buddhism. In 1837, a Sanskrit manuscript of this text arrived in Paris—sent by an enterprising official of the British East India Company in Nepal—and was examined by a brilliant young scholar named Eugène Burnouf. Burnouf would write back to his benefactor:

> I have without reserve devoted every moment that I could steal from my occupations as professor of Sanskrit and academician to this work, of which I have already read rather considerable portions. You will not be astonished that I did not understand everything; the material is very new for me, the style as well

---

[1] Paul Harrison, "Canon," *EB* 1:113.

> as the content. . . . Without being impious (but you are not a clergyman), I know of nothing so Christian in all of Asia. Brahmanism now seems to me a rigid and merciless Judaism; you have found moral Christianity, full of compassion for all creatures. . . . Finally, I confess to you that I am passionate about this reading, and that I would like to have more time and health to attend to it day and night.[2]

A child of the French Enlightenment and no friend of organized religion, Burnouf was yet gripped by the *Lotus* and would complete a translation in French in two years' time.

Eventually, several translations in English would appear. I will use that of Leon Hurvitz for its readability and, by all accounts, its accuracy.[3] Although rendered from a fifth century Chinese translation—of which there were several, due to its popularity in China—this *Lotus* takes account of an extant Sanskrit original, the core of which may have been composed in India as early as 100 BCE. It grew over time until reaching its final form in the third century CE.

The title may be translated as follows: *sad-* ("true, real") *dharma-* ("teaching, law") *puṇḍarīka-* ("lotus, white lotus") *sūtra* ("sermon"): "Sermon on the Lotus of the True Dharma." Or, as Hurvitz prefers: "Scripture of the Lotus Blossom of the Fine Dharma." As with the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā-prajñāpāramitā*, this scripture claims it was taught by Gautama Buddha himself in the fifth century BCE. Further, it claims to be a "true teaching"—as distinct from that of other religions and, also, from other forms of Buddhism. The pejorative term "Hīnayāna" and self-congratulating term "Mahāyāna" now appear in the text itself. As in the Pure Land materials we have just seen, there are a multitude of Bodhisattvas—both earthly and Celestial—and not only an earthly Śākyamuni as Teacher of the text but also countless Celestial Buddhas teaching, always and everywhere, in their countless Buddha-fields.

Like the "Perfection of Wisdom" genre, this scripture praises itself for all the benefits its devotees will reap and damns those who would question its authenticity. And, yes, we hear of the perfect Wisdom that "all *dharmas* are empty," a special knowledge that must be united with Compassion (reminding Burnouf of Christian Love). Yet, as Hurvitz puts it: "All the same, the *Lotus*'s references to 'emptiness,' if laid end to end, would not amount to much."[4] Likewise, paradoxical language is present but not emphasized.

Instead, the *Lotus Sūtra* is a very early example of Buddhist literature willing to speak positively of the religious life, of what one is reaching—and not just negatively of what one is letting go. The scholar Carolyn Rhys Davids (unlike her husband, T. W. Rhys Davids), criticized that apophatic feature of Early Buddhism, saying that: "there is an amazingly small number of positive terms, but there is an abundance of negative terms"—as if the good life can be entirely "resolved in birth and dying, and the thing to make cease was the being reborn and the being redead."[5] She was reminded of those Greek soldiers in the ancient classics who had wandered bereft through hostile Anatolia to reach the sea—and a way home—exclaiming famously at the shoreline, "The sea! The sea!" They did not shout, she points out, "No more land!" As we shall soon discover, the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas will now preach the "Sea."

---

[2] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., *The "Lotus Sūtra": A Biography* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 126-127.

[3] Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*.

[4] Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, xxiii.

[5] C. A. F. Rhys Davids, "Buddhism and the Negative," *Journal of the Pali Text Society* 8 (1924-1927): 239, 248.

They will often do that by using religious fantasy—someone has called it "phantasmagoria"—that continues to play havoc with discursive thinking yet also captures one's feeling, touches the soul. There are even passages in the *Lotus* that suggest we have souls, something that Early Buddhism tried to avoid. A new kataphatic strategy in this scripture is to tell "stories," with all their suggestive allusions—relying upon the listener or reader to catch the meaning.

This is actually what captivated Burnouf. He had skimmed the *Aṣṭa* and wondered, "But what is this *prajñā* itself?"[6] In the *Lotus*, however, he found parables; and that reminded him of the parables of Jesus. This helps explain why the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra* became the most influential Buddhist scripture in East Asia, why there would be movements in China and Japan claiming it was the only true scripture in all of Buddhism, why even today millions chant its title (in Japanese, *Namu my*ōh*ō renge ky*ō) to find worldly success, long life, Enlightenment. There are copies in Chinese in which "each of the *Lotus Sūtra*'s 69,384 characters has been drawn seated on a lotus or within a *stūpa*, thereby expressing the conviction that 'each character of the *Lotus* is a living buddha.'"[7]

We do not know this scripture's actual fate in ancient India—a history that remains obscure—but it calls itself, "White Lotus Blossom," a floral symbol that had long served Buddhism. It was an epithet of Gautama's Mother and the "Mother" of all Buddhas, a symbol for the religion itself.

Introduction

The scripture opens:

> Thus have I heard. At one time, the Buddha was dwelling in the city of Rājagṛha, on Vulture Peak, together with twelve thousand great *bhikṣus*. All were *arhants*, their outflows already exhausted . . . . Their names were . . . [twenty-two are listed, many of them familiar such as Mahākāśyapa, Śāriputra, Ānanda, etc.]. There were also another two thousand persons, including those who had more to learn and those who had not. There was Mahāprajāpati, the *bhikṣuṇī*, together with six thousand followers. Rāhula's mother Yaśodharā, the *bhikṣuṇī*, was also there together with her followers. There were eighty thousand *bodhisattva-mahāsattvas*, all nonbacksliders [at least, Eighth Stage on the Bodhisattva Path] in *anuttarasamyaksaṃbodhi* ["Incomparable Perfect Complete Enlightenment"] . . . . Their names were. . . [eighteen great Bodhisattvas are named, many of them familiar such as Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, etc.].[8] (1-2)

It is already crowded on the top of a medium-sized mountain outside the capital city of Magadha. Yet the assembled multitude is soon joined by tens of thousands of gods along with supernatural beings such as *nāgas*, *yakṣas*, *garuḍas*—themselves joined by "several hundreds of thousands" of

6 Lopez, *Lotus*, 125.

7 Jacqueline I. Stone, "Lotus Sūtra," *EB* 1:474.

8 To avoid cumbersome citation, I will use page numbers of Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, in the body of my text. I have also altered this passage slightly to fit my book's style—and will take that liberty elsewhere.

human beings, including king Ajātaśatru and his retinue. They all make obeisance to the Buddha's feet, we are told, and somehow all sit to one side.

Little wonder that some Chinese Buddhist exegetes considered the possibility that "Vulture Peak" was only apparently a mountain and, instead, a miraculous Pure Land where anything can happen. Nichiren preached in thirteenth-century Japan that anyone who chanted the title of the *Lotus Sūtra* was, in fact, on "Vulture Peak" with the Buddha.

We then learn that the "World-Honored One" preached a sermon—appropriately named, "Immeasurable Doctrine"—whereupon he crossed his legs and entered into *samādhi*, "where his body and mind were motionless." Flowers fell from heaven, the world trembled in six different ways, and the impossibly large audience "felt that this had never happened before, and, joyously joining palms, single-mindedly they beheld the Buddha." In other words, they, too, entered *samādhi*—and experienced the following:

> At that time the Buddha emitted a glow from the tuft of white hair between his brows that illuminated eighteen thousand worlds to the east, omitting none of them, reaching downward as far as the Avīci hell and upward as far as the Akaniṣṭha gods. In these worlds there could be fully seen the six kinds of living beings in those lands. There could also be seen the Buddhas present in those lands, and the *sūtradharmas* preached by those Buddhas could be heard. (4)

The entire universe (at least, "to the east") has been made visible by a light ray emanating from one of the Thirty-two Marks on the Lord's body. Technically, according to Trikāya doctrine, a Nirmāṇa-kāya cannot perform that feat—only a Saṃbhoga-kāya—but this is early Mahāyāna, and there is no consistency even later.

The Bodhisattva Maitreya, who had come from Tuṣita, asked the wise Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī the meaning of the miracle. Mañjuśrī answered that he had seen it all before—"incalculable, numberless kalpas ago"—when a previous Buddha, just before his death, had preached his final and most important sermon, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. And so he concluded that would happen again. He also recalled that the disciples of that Lord were grieved at their master's impending Parinirvāṇa. This is that same religious crisis we saw in Early Buddhist *Digha Nikāya* at the death of Gautama Buddha.

The *Lotus Sūtra* proceeds to offer new solutions to the crisis. One is to announce a saving succession of Buddhas. A former Buddha promises in verse:

> "When I cross to extinction,
> Have neither care nor fear,
> For this bodhisattva, Womb of Excellence,
> . . . .
> He shall next become a Buddha
> Named Pure Body;
> He, too, shall save an incalculable multitude." (19)

That solution would make sense even to assembled disciples since past Buddhas were succeeded eventually by other Buddhas.

Much later in the text, however, we hear a different solution. Śākyamuni Buddha says that after preaching this last sermon and dying: "After my extinction . . . I will become a Buddha in another realm, having again a different name"—continuing to teach in that other Buddha-field so that sentient beings will have the opportunity to hear marvelous truth (147). In other words, he will succeed *himself* elsewhere and remain available, at least distantly.

Deeper still into the text, the Lord confesses a final new truth, namely, that is he not going to be succeeded by another nor is he going to succeed himself but he is actually "enduring, never perishing"—eternally teaching at all times and everywhere for the sake of the salvation of everyone. The scripture reads:

> For a hundred thousand myriads of millions of *nayutas* of *asaṃkhyeya-kalpas* ["incalculable *kalpas*" of time] I have been constantly dwelling in this Sahā ["enduring," i.e, here] world-sphere, preaching the Dharma, teaching and converting; also elsewhere, in a hundred thousand myriads of millions of *nayutas* of *asaṃkhyeyas* of realms I have been guiding and benefitting the beings. . . . My life-span is incalculable *asaṃkhyeyakalpas*, ever enduring, never perishing . . . . Yet even now, though in reality I am not to pass into extinction, yet I proclaim that I am about to accept extinction. (238-239)

While that final thought sounds like a paradox—drawing us into the world of the *Aṣṭa*—we can interpret it in light of the developed Trikāya doctrine. This Teacher who calls himself "Śākyamuni" is actually a Nirmāṇa-kāya pretending to be a "human being" in order to teach humans (a compassionate strategy). In this illusory but effective form he says that he will soon be "gone," in order to instill a religious urgency in his audience. As a Dharma-kāya, however, he will in reality never pass into extinction—since eternal.

Miracle of the Stūpa

The Indian mind has a great capacity for hyperbole. And so the religious drama continues in chapter eleven with the "Apparition of the Jeweled Stūpa":

> At that time, there appeared before the Buddha a seven-jeweled *stūpa*, five hundred *yojanas* in height and two hundred and fifty *yojanas* in breadth, welling up out of the earth and resting in mid-air, set about with sundry precious objects. (183)

Lopez tells us that, judging from the unit of distance called a *yojana*, this "massive *stūpa* is four thousand miles high and two thousand miles wide"—lest we think we can imagine its size as it hovers there.[9] The text does not say why this bejeweled structure arrives from under the earth, but

[9] Donald S. Lopez, Jr., and Jacqueline I. Stone, *Two Buddhas: Seated Side by Side* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 138.

things past are often "down" in Indian symbolism, while things in the future are "up."[10] And that fits what happens next:

> At that time, from the midst of the jeweled *stūpa* issued forth the sound of a mighty voice, praising and saying, "How excellent! How excellent, O Śākyamuni, O World-Honored One, that with great undifferentiating wisdom you can teach the Bodhisattva-dharma, that you can preach to the great multitude the *Scripture of the Blossom of the Fine Dharma*, which Buddhas keep protectively in mind!

We learn that the voice belongs to a long-deceased Buddha named Prabhūtaratna ("Many Jewels"). He had vowed even as a Bodhisattva that, whenever the *Lotus Sūtra* was preached, he would appear to "bear witness to it by praising it, saying, 'Excellent.'" But that meant—so the audience of the text suddenly realizes—that Prabhūtaratna was not really dead!

It meant what we already know, that a Buddha who has passed into Nirvāṇa has not really passed into Nirvāṇa—giving new meaning to the notion of a Nirvāṇa of "no fixed abode" that we found in the *Aṣṭa.* It meant what we concluded about *stūpa* worship: that the relic remains of a deceased Buddha housed in a funerary mound—however beautifully designed with gateways and sculpted reliefs—were not what they seemed to be. Instead, as the Lord of the *Lotus Sūtra* explains: "Within this jeweled *stūpa* is the whole body [and not just the cremated remains] of a Thus Come One." Now every Buddhist could know why circumambulating the monuments at Sāñcī and at Bhārhut felt like the right thing to do despite being told, by more conservative teachers, that the Buddha was beyond worship or communication.

Richard Gombrich discovered this same tension in his anthropological study of current conservative Theravāda Buddhism in Sri Lanka, as summarized by Harvey: "while, *cognitively*, the Buddha is acknowledged as beyond worldly contact, *affectively*, at the level of feelings, he is often looked on as a living source of benefit."[11]

Eager to confirm what they now know and always felt, the Buddha's devotees request that the Teacher open the Jeweled Stūpa. So the Lord rises into the air:

> Thereupon with his right finger Śākyamunibuddha opened the door of the seven-jeweled *stūpa*, which made a great sound as of a bar being pushed aside to open the gate of a walled city. At that very moment all the assembled multitude saw the Thus Come One Many Jewels in the jeweled *stūpa*, seated on a lion throne, his body whole and undecayed, as if entered into Dhyāna-concentration. (187)

Then, in one of the great moments of Mahāyāna Buddhism, Śākyamuni Buddha joined Prabhūtaratna Buddha to share the same seat.

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[10] John S. Strong, *Relics of the Buddha* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2004), 36.

[11] Peter Harvey, "Portrayals of Ultimate Reality and of Holy and Divine Beings," in *Buddhism*, ed. Peter Harvey (London: Continuum, 2001), 104.

Figure 12.1 Two Buddhas on One Diamond Seat

But this was not supposed to happen! The Early Buddhist *Majjhima Nikāya* had been explicit: "It is impossible, it cannot happen that two Accomplished Ones, Fully Enlightened Ones, could arise contemporaneously in one world-system—there is no such possibility."[12] And that is because this Sahā world would be "shattered" by the numinous impact. It is why Pure Land Buddhism had to keep the Buddha-fields at great distances from each other. Yet Asian art would faithfully record this unexpected and surprisingly benign event in sculpture and painting.

See Figure 12.1 for a sixth century Chinese gilded bronze of the two Lords surrounded by mandorlas of Wisdom "Fire," with bodies elongated to indicate their transcendence, yet sitting in *lalita-āsana* ("relaxed posture") with one leg raised and the other pendant as if to say that their presence together is only natural. It is even wonderfully disconcerting to realize they are sitting inside a *stūpa*—one of them "extinct" but not and the other "not yet extinct" while sitting inside a tomb as if he were. The image seems to say that we should not trust what we have heard or can understand but only what we "see" in our own "stories."

[12] Bodhi, *MN* 115.14 (p. 929).

Parable of the Burning House

The Mahāyāna of the *Lotus* is still young and must justify itself. How can it be that the Buddha taught a Path to become an Arhat, and presumably a Path to become a Pratyekabuddha, but is now teaching a Bodhisattva Path to become a Buddha? The answer is found in the following story told by the Lord to his wisest early disciple who was already an Arhat:

> Śāriputra, imagine that a country, or a city-state, or a municipality has a man of great power, advanced in years and of incalculable wealth, owning many fields and houses, as well as servants. His house is broad and great; it has only one doorway, but great multitudes of human beings, a hundred, or two hundred, or even five hundred, are dwelling in it. The halls are rotting, the walls crumbling, the pillars decayed at their base, the beams and ridgepoles precariously tipped. Throughout the house and all at the same time, quite suddenly a fire breaks out, burning down all the apartments. The great man's sons, ten, or twenty, or thirty of them are still in the house. (58)

The story is somewhat contrived since it is unlikely that a very wealthy man would own a rotting house—its disrepair being one of the reasons it caught fire. Actually, the Buddha will explain everything later, turning what begins as parable or indirect teaching into an allegory whereby each element can be identified as something else. We will eventually hear that the powerful "man" is the Buddha, the "multitude" is the human Destiny, the "sons" are the Buddha's disciples, and the "house" signifies the Three Realms of existence—that are "rotten" with birth, old age, and sickness—and always "on fire" with lust, hatred, and ignorance.

The story continues:

> The great man, directly he sees this great fire breaking out from four directions is alarmed and terrified. He then has this thought: "Though I was able to get out safely through this burning doorway, yet my sons within the burning house, attached as they are to their games, are unaware, ignorant, unperturbed, unafraid. The fire is coming to press in upon them, the pain will cut them to the quick. Yet at heart they are not horrified, nor have they any wish to leave."

This is interesting. It tells us that the First Noble Truth must be learned, that Buddhism is no longer addressing an India in social turmoil from its second urbanization but is now socially more stable. It is not "suffering" so much. The Lord says, "they do not even know what a 'fire' is."

But rather than preach another "Fire Sermon" as he had in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*, he devises an "expedient" to take advantage of his sons' addiction to play and their predilection for certain toys. That makes its own biting critique: that ignorance of the human predicament is accompanied by childishly playing around with life in a dangerous way. I am reminded of something Jung said about the difficulty of psychotherapy: "It is as if somebody said: 'Hurry up, the house is on fire!' and one

replied, 'Do you really think that houses in Zurich can catch fire?' Perfectly unable to hear what is said."[13]

Accordingly, the father proclaims to his preoccupied sons:

> "The things you so love to play with are rare and hard to get. If you do not get them, you are certain to regret it later. Things like these, a variety of goat-drawn carriages, deer-drawn carriages, and ox-drawn carriages, are now outside the door for you to play with. Come out of this burning house quickly, all of you! I will give all of you what you desire." (59)

Of course, the children rush out of the burning house, even pushing each other aside to see who can get out (of Saṃsāra) first!

And what do they find?

> Śāriputra, at that time, the great man gives to each child one great carriage. The carriage is high and wide, adorned with a multitude of jewels . . . it is yoked to a white ox, whose skin is pure white, whose bodily form is lovely, whose muscular strength is great, whose tread is even and fleet like the wind. . . . What is the reason? Because this great man, of wealth incalculable, his various storehouses all full to overflowing, has this thought: "My wealth being limitless, I may not give small, inferior carriages to my children. Now these little boys are all my sons, I love them without distinction." (60)

The Teacher explains the story in Buddhist terms:

> Have no lust for coarse and broken-down visible matter, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles! If, clinging to them greedily, you display lust for them, then you shall be burnt. Quick, get out of the three worlds! You shall get three vehicles, those of voice-hearers [*śrāvakas*], *pratyekabuddha*, and Buddha. I now guarantee it, and I am never false. All you need do is strive earnestly with effort . . . . Then he gives the Great Vehicle equally to all, not allowing any of them to gain passage into extinction for himself alone, but conveying them all to the extinction of the Thus Come One. (62-63)

This is another great moment in the Mahāyāna because it attempts to reconcile the variety of Buddhist Paths coexisting in the early centuries CE or, at least, the different religious goals of the ordained who are living together in the same monastery under the same Vinaya rules.

Does the attempt actually work? Judging from debates in later Buddhism, the "Parable of the Burning House" contains too many ambiguities to be definitive. Yes, it proclaims the good news that the goal is, unambiguously, Buddhahood. In response, "Śāriputra danced for joy"—or, lest that

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[13] Jung, *Dream Analysis*, 652.

appear unseemly for a monk, we also read, "I have in my heart the thought of dancing for joy. I have gained something I never had before." (49)

But what did the Arhat actually hear? He could have heard that whether one seeks Arhathood (with a "goat cart") or Pratyekabuddhahood (with a "deer cart") or Buddhahood (with an "ox cart") one will always gain at the end of one's efforts the "ox cart" of Buddhahood But Śāriputra could have heard that first one needs to practice the Path in a "goat cart" toward Arhathood, then practice in a "deer cart" toward Pratyekabuddhahood, and then be ready to take the Bodhisattva Vow and ride in an "ox cart" for three incalculable aeons to reach the Incomparable Complete Awakening of Buddhahood. Those are two quite different interpretations of the parable—the difference between inclusive and exclusive that has exercised Buddhist thinkers for centuries.[14]

And the reader may have already noticed an oddity: if a "cart" signifies a particular "Vehicle" or Path for reaching Nirvāṇa (however defined), it is odd that one would receive a "Vehicle" outside the "house" of Saṃsāra. Another problem concerns the Buddha's description of the third cart. As a lure, it is just an "ox cart" preferred by some of his sons. As a surprise gift to all, however, it is "one great carriage" that is "adorned with a multitude of jewels" and "yoked to a white ox, whose skin is pure white," etc. Is the promised ox cart the same or different from the one that is given? Lopez tells us: "Passages in the *Lotus Sūtra* can be found to support either interpretation, and the issue was debated by East Asian exegetes, among whom it became known as the 'three carts or four carts' controversy."[15] This is yet another example of the archetypal symbolism of the "Three and the (problematic) Fourth."

Did the Buddha Lie?

Curiously, the Lord is not very interested in clearing up these problems but wants to know if Śāriputra thinks the "father" in the story lied to his sons about his gift. After all, he had shouted a promise of three different toys, "I now guarantee it, and I am never false." The wisest Arhat answers dutifully: "No, World-Honored One! This great man has but enabled his children to escape the calamity of fire, thus preserving their bodily lives. He is guilty of no falsehood"—it was just an "expedient device" (*upāya*). (60) But we are free to decide otherwise, that the "father" (who is Buddha) has violated the fourth of the Five Precepts.

It is not the first time. In the *Khuddhaka Nikāya* of Early Buddhism, a monk named Nanda realized he could not "keep up the holy life" and was determined to return to householder status. This was Gautama's half-brother, so he was particularly concerned and asked the reason why. He learned that prior to his renunciation Nanda had been engaged to a most lovely Śākyan girl—"the envy of the countryside"—and she had looked up at her betrothed as he left, her hair half-combed, and pleaded, "Hurry back master." Nanda could not get that last look out of his mind. Taking matters into his own hand, the Lord flew off with this vacillating monk to the heaven of the Thirty-Three gods. He showed him the divine nymphs there and asked how they compared to his earthly intended:

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[14] Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone, "Interpreting the *Lotus Sūtra*," in Stephen F. Teiser and Jacqueline I. Stone, eds., *Readings of the "Lotus Sūtra"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 20.

[15] Lopez, *Two Buddhas*,79.

"There's no comparison. The 500 dove-footed nymphs are lovelier, better looking, more charming."

Then take joy, Nanda. Take Joy! I am your guarantor for getting 500 dove-footed nymphs.

"If the Blessed One is my guarantor for getting 500 dove-footed nymphs, I will enjoy leading the holy life under the Blessed One."

It all works out well. First of all, Nanda's fellow monks criticize him for practicing in order to get nymphs. But he practices really hard—and becomes Enlightened, discovering thereby the folly of his intention. Dutifully, this Arhat "releases" the lying Lord from his "guarantee."[16]

"Darker" themes In these stories, Buddhism is allowing some "darkness" into its religion—for the sake of the greater good. It is what Kierkegaard called the "teleological suspension of the ethical" for the greater good of obeying God. What we have just seen in Buddhism could be called harmless "white lies" and not nearly that serious. But darker shades appear increasingly in the religion—probably inevitably since the "opposites" are unavoidable.

The Mahāyāna will even find room for something called "compassionate violence." Peter Harvey explains:

> an (advanced) *Bodhisattva* may kill a person about to kill many people—so that he saves them and the assailant avoids the evil karma of killing—provided that this is done out of genuine compassion, and with a willingness to suffer the karmic consequences of killing; however, if this is sincere, such consequences will be lighter than normal. He may also lie to save others, and steal the booty of thieves and unjust rulers, so that they are hindered in their evil ways.[17]

The Buddhist emphasis on karmic "intention," "skillful means," and "compassion" come together here; but it is somewhat disconcerting to discover this argument in a religion founded on "nonviolence" (*ahiṃsā*). Not surprisingly, it is an occasion for perversion, as when Buddhist masters during WWII preached the doctrine of compassionate violence to justify "soldier-Zen" and even encourage Japanese aggression and torture "for the greater good."[18]

It is similarly disconcerting to find violence toward the body in these more "feminine" Mahāyāna scriptures. Although enacted with an attitude of devotion and for the sake of great merit, this extreme practice is hardly in accord with Siddhārtha Gautama's own "Middle Way." In the *Aṣṭa*, we can read of an earthly Bodhisattva named, "Ever Weeping," who wished to offer a gift to a more advanced Bodhisattva—by selling his own body, piece by bloody piece, the price to be used as a

[16] Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, trans., "Nanda Sutta," *Khuddaka Nikāya*, Udāna 3.2. *Access to Insight (BCBS Edition)*, 30 August 2012, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/ud/ud.3.02/than.html.

[17] Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 271.

[18] See Brian Daizen Victoria, "A Buddhological Critique of 'Soldier-Zen' in Wartime Japan," in Michael K. Jerryson and Mark Juergensmeyer, eds., *Buddhist Warfare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 105-130.

pious donation. Fortunately, the grisly scene is interrupted by the daughter of a merchant who gives him the money he needs.[19]

Even in the otherwise lovely *Lotus*, we hear of a Celestial Bodhisattva named, "Medicine King" (Bhaiṣajyarāja), who wished to offer his own body to the Buddha and, accordingly: "wrapped his body in a garment adorned with divine jewels, anointed himself with fragrant oils, with the force of supernatural penetration took a vow, and then burnt his own body." (295) The scripture declares this suicide to be the "prime gift"—the "most honorable, the supreme." Since the body burned for over a thousand years, the self-sacrifice is clearly symbolic of religious commitment—and need not be taken literally.

Nevertheless, the scripture advises worshippers to "burn a finger or even a toe as an offering" to gain much merit. How this advice was taken in India is unknown. But many Chinese Buddhists would, in fact, perform such acts out of piety. James Benn writes:

> Although the practice of burning the body was criticized on occasion, by both secular authorities and Buddhist monks, it has been an accepted feature of Buddhist devotionalism in East Asia until recent times. The offering of fingers and burning of incense on the skin (another symbolic act of self-immolation) still occur in China, Taiwan, and Korea. The tradition of making small burn marks on the crown of the head as part of the ordination ceremony for Chinese monks and nuns ultimately derives from the example of Medicine King.[20]

Although Jungian psychology values ritual as symbolic action to express and activate the archetypal psyche—and knows that "suffering" is required for greater consciousness—there is something wrong with these accounts. They perpetuate too easily Buddhism's disgust for the human body.

Parable of the Prodigal Son

Four Arhats who learn that they are actually on their way to becoming Buddhas somehow tell the following story together:

> Suppose there were a man who was young in years and who also, forsaking his father and running off, dwelt long in another country, whether ten, or twenty, or as much as fifty years. Not only did he grow old, but he was also reduced to destitution, running about in all four directions in quest of food and clothing. At length, in his wanderings, he accidentally headed toward his native land. His father, who had preceded him, and who had sought his son without finding him, had stopped midway in a certain city. The father's house was great and rich, with treasure and jewels immeasurable. . . . The profits that flowed in and out would

[19] Conze, *Eight Thousand*, 285.

[20] See James A. Benn, "The *Lotus Sūtra* and Self-Immolation," in Teiser and Stone, *Readings,* 107-108.

> fill the whole realm, and also merchants and itinerant traders were very numerous. (85)

Thus begins what Burnouf called the "Parable of the Prodigal Son," referring to Jesus' parable in Luke 15. It is a label that has stuck despite significant differences. The Buddhist story is that of a single unfaithful son while the much shorter biblical story is that of two sons, one of them loyal and one not. The former story speaks of an accidental return of the son while the Bible says the disloyal son "came to his senses" and deliberately went home to confess his "sinfulness." Both tales, however, record a loving reconciliation between a wayward son and a forgiving father. Without having to be told this time, we know that we are the "son" who has lost his way and that the rich and welcoming "father" is the Buddha—whose "house" this time is not rotten but grand.

The *Lotus* continues:

> At that time, the poor son, having visited various settlements and passed through kingdoms and metropolises, at length reached the city where his father was staying. The father and mother were thinking of their son, for it had already been more than fifty years since they parted with him. . . . "Old and decrepit, we have much gold and silver and many precious gems, with which our treasure houses are filled to overflowing, but we have no son." . . . At that time, the poor son, hiring himself out as a laborer in his wanderings, by chance reached his father's house, where, stopping by the side of the gate, he saw in the distance his father seated on a lion throne. . . .

Let us note that the "time periods" of this Buddhist story are much too long if taken literally but symbolically express a long, slow process of "gradual" realization—as distinct from notions of "sudden" Enlightenment that we will discuss. We note, too, that "accident" or "chance" plays an important part in the desired outcome (although that is not a feature in the biblical account). But, surely, this is "meaningful chance" given the Law of *karma*, not to mention the hidden workings of the Bodhicitta ("Thought of Enlightenment") within all Bodhisattvas.

Jungian thoughts First of all, psychologically, there does not seem to be such a thing as "accident" when one gets to know the inner meaning of events. This fact led Jung to value the Chinese *I Ching* and its oracles based on "chance." It led to his hypothesis of synchronicity between inner and outer events. In the Buddhist parable of the "Prodigal Son," then, we are observing what we already witnessed at the "Great Departure" when Gautama left home for the sake of his authentic vocation. His disobedience was described positively, for the sake of Enlightenment, the father's resistance a religious error. Here, that conflict is reversed, and the son is in error (as in the biblical parable).

We can understand both versions as psychologically correct, however, from different angles: it is necessary that the ego leave its embeddedness in the "family psyche" in order to discover its own identity. Yet that is, by definition, an act of "disloyalty"—albeit a necessary one, and even the

first lesson in discovering there must be room for "sin" against the collective if one is to develop as a psychological adult. Usually, the lesson does not require an actual break in family ties, but it may.

In any case, this pictures only the "first half" of life, one that often enough gets one into trouble by too much "self-reliance" and overrating of one's will. It pictures a person having left not only identification with the family psyche but also any sense of relying upon the larger Forces of the unconscious for survival. Thus, the Buddhist "son" is "reduced to destitution" (the biblical son sinking to the indignity, especially for a Jew, of tending pigs).

Yet it is precisely here that the "second half" of life can begin. It is also only then that anyone is willing to enter into psychotherapy to discover what is "wrong"—although that is not always necessary. Either way, there must be an experience of failure—and, more important, an admission of one's part in it (something that is often easier in a therapy setting of trust). But confessing one's "sinfulness" is emphasized by the biblical story and not the Buddhist one. What is emphasized by the *Lotus* is that the "father" (we would call this the Self archetype) is actively searching for his lost "son"! He longs for reconciliation, even as this son is aimlessly "running about in all four directions." He wants him to share in his "gold and silver and many precious gems" now and inherit all of it upon his death.

The Buddhist scripture is psychologically astute, informing us that the "son" panicked upon seeing all that "wealth"—and "quickly ran off." Edinger noticed in his practice that the archetypal psyche can be so overwhelming—even when "affirming"—that "wounded" patients often "cling obstinately to their original experience" of rejecting parents, for example. They "find it very difficult to accept and endure a positive parent experience"—now mediated by a sympathetic analyst, or an affirming superior at work, a loving spouse at home.[21] Our scripture informs us that it can take a long time to overcome one's fear of "Good News."

The *Lotus* reports that the father—"who instantly recognized" his son at the gate—resorted to ruses, compassionate strategies (*upāya*) to lure his reluctant offspring "home." First, he sent servants to hire him to "sweep away dung" at the house (psychologically, to work first on the personal shadow). But, then, the father devised a way to meet his son who was "grimy and soiled with dung" at his own level of understanding:

> Straightway he removed his necklaces, his fine outer garments, and his ornaments, and put on instead a rough, torn, dirty, tar-stained garment and, smearing dust over his body, took in his right hand a dung-shovel.

In that guise, the wealthy man approached his long-lost son personally and praised him for his work, increasing his wage: "I am like your father: have no more cares!"

We hear the *double entendre*. But it is an image of extraordinary divine Grace—the Buddhist version of the Christian Incarnation of God in Jesus, a lowly carpenter, sent to save tax collectors and prostitutes, and bring us all closer to the Self. The guise serves, also, to redeem the role of Gautama Buddha who was being demoted as a mere *nirmāṇa*-kāya—that we now know is entirely necessary, albeit "demeaning," for enlightening the human Destiny.

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[21] Edinger, *Melville's "Moby-Dick,"* 84.

After another "twenty years," the "prodigal" son is promoted to manage the father's accounts—until on his deathbed the great and wealthy owner of the house summoned all the "kings, great ministers, Kṣatriyas, and householders" to proclaim:

> "Sirs! Know that this is my son, begotten by me. Having forsaken me in such-and-such a city and run off, he suffered loneliness and hardship for more than fifty years. . . . Formerly, in my native city, affected by grief, I sought him. Some time ago, I suddenly encountered him by accident and got him back. He is really my son. I am really his father. Now all the treasure I have belongs to my son. (88)

We hear in this passage the same Voice that Jesus heard at his baptism, after a troubled youth of illegitimacy: "Thou art *my* beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." (KJV, Mark 1:11; italics added). The Arhats who recounted this parable of the "Prodigal Son" proclaimed: "we did not know we are truly the Buddha's children. Now, at last, we know." (89)

Parable of the Hidden Jewel

The "Parable of the Hidden Jewel" is not very different from what we have just heard—which is to say that these stories are not primarily conveying religious information but a feeling for it. Now, five hundred Arhats convey the following (somehow in unison):

> There is a man who arrives at the house of a close friend, where he gets drunk on wine, then lies down. At that time, his friend, having official business, is on the point of going away, when he sews a priceless jewel into the interior of the first man's garment and departs, leaving it with him. The first man. . . . [eventually] suffers such hardship that he is content with however little he may get. Then his friend, encountering him by chance, speaks these words to him: "Alas, Sir! How can you have come to this for the sake of mere food and clothing? Once I, wishing to afford you comfort and joy. . . sewed a priceless jewel into the inside of your garment. Surely it is still there. . . . How foolish you have been!" (164-165)

It would have been good if the friend had written a note explaining his generosity before leaving town, but that is clearly not the point of the story.

The psychology The story's point is that we have a Jewel "hidden" in our "garment" (our body? our materialism? our personalistic psychology?) of which we cannot take advantage due to our "drunken" ignorance. That is reminiscent of the Tibetan notion of scripture as *gter ma* or "treasure" hidden under water or underground waiting for the right time to be discovered. Jung wrote frequently of this motif of the "Treasure hard to attain"—hidden in a field, in the depths of the sea, or surrounded by a serpent—found in myth and fairy tale. He says it refers to the precious Self at the core of our being of which we are unaware. We live our lives in psychological "squalor" while seeking riches that never satisfy, not knowing that we are already "rich."

These are just some of the many stories found in the *Lotus Sūtra,* all meant to keep its readers—its reciters, copiers, worshippers—in touch with great Buddhist truths by way of its symbols. Thus, the scripture can rightly refer to itself as a "great benefit" to all living beings, "fulfilling their desires":

> Like a clear, cool pond, it can slake the thirst of all. As a chilled person finds fire, as a naked person finds clothing, a merchant finds a chief, as a child finds its mother, as a passenger finds a ship, as a sick person finds a physician, as darkness finds a torch, as a poor person finds a jewel, as the people find a king, as a commercial traveler finds the sea, as a candle dispels darkness, this scripture of the "Dharma Blossom" . . . . (299)

We might even hear in our own background a favorite Christian hymn: "Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound) / That sav'd a wretch like me! / I once was lost, but now am found, / Was blind, but now I see."

"Vimalakīrti Sūtra"

Like the *Lotus*, the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra* ("Sermon on the Instructions of Vimalakīrti") belongs to that small "canon" of Buddhist works to which modern scholars have paid close attention, translating it into English several times. The scripture was so popular in East Asia that the Chinese translated it at least seven times (the first in 188 CE) and the Tibetans did so twice. In part, that is because the text is short and accessible yet also because it purports to be a *sūtra* or "sermon" taught primarily not by Śākyamuni Buddha but by a householder named Vimalakīrti. The Buddha is still present in the narrative—performing miracles and teaching in a monastic setting—but this layman gives the main *nirdeśa* or "instruction" to the Buddha's disciples at his house.

That was very appealing to the Chinese who had difficulty integrating a renunciant Indian religion, that they otherwise found attractive, into their own culture with its Confucian emphasis upon the family. Indeed, they translated the Sanskrit word for "householder" (incorrectly) as "retired scholar," a person of recognizable respect in their own culture, certainly moreso than a monk.[22]

The text is early, perhaps early second century CE, and seems to be aware of even earlier scriptures like the *Aṣṭa* and the *Lotus*. Like them, it is self-referent, belonging to that "cult of the book" and valuing itself as superior to *stūpas* for making merit. Like all early Mahāyāna scripture, it feels the need to justify itself in the face of established tradition— thus, giving the Śrāvakas a hard time, but then giving its own Bodhisattvas a hard time, often with sarcasm and humor. That appealed to the Taoist side of Chinese culture that was at odds with the Confucian side. It is why Burton Watson noted in his translation of the *Vimalakīrti* that "in philosophical depth and brilliance of language it rivals the *Chuang Tzu*," a Taoist classic known as much for its wit as for its profundity.[23]

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[22] Jonathan A. Silk, "Taking the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* Seriously," *Annual Report of The International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology at Soka University for the Academic Year 2013*, vol. 17 (2014), 160.

[23] Burton Watson, trans., *The Vimalakirti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), ix.

But the scripture is much valued on its own terms. Edward Hamlin calls it "*sui generis"*: "Because it so admirably merges the visionary with the conceptual, the aesthetic with the scholastic, the VNS stands as perhaps the purest example of philosophical drama the surviving Mahāyāna materials provide."[24] In his own French translation, Étienne Lamotte calls the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-s*ūtra the "crowning jewel" of Mahāyāna literature.[25]

That is to say more of this scripture's reception outside India, however, than inside the home of its composition. As with the *Lotus*, we do not know much of the Indian history of the *Vimalakīrti*, nor was it quoted very often by other Mahāyāna texts. In fact, there was no Sanskrit manuscript available for modern translation and study until a copy (from the twelfth century) was discovered in the Potala palace of Lhasa in 1999. Gérard Fussman assures us, however, that there are no real surprises in the recovered manuscript: "*des passages beaucoup plus brilliants, beaucoup plus vivaces, en sanskrit plus élégant*."[26] Therefore, I will use an English translation by Robert Thurman from a ninth-century Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit.[27]

Introduction

The scripture opens:

> Reverence to all Buddhas, Bodhiattvas, Āryaśrāvakas ["noble hearers," Arhats], and Pratyekabuddhas, in the past, the present, and the future.
> Thus have I heard at one time. The Lord Buddha was in residence in the garden of Āmrapāli, in the city of Vaiśālī, attended by a great gathering. (10)

There is nothing new here, except for a change in punctuation in the opening phrase of the so-called *nidāna*. The Tibetans prefer a period break after "time": so instead of, "Thus have I heard. At one time . . .," we read, "Thus have I heard at one time." Wayman says this places the reporter at the scene—perhaps hinting at Ānanda's sudden mystical understanding, "all at once."[28] The location is that park donated by the courtesan Āmrapālī, the "mango woman" who beat out the Licchavi princes who were trying to invite the Buddha to lunch. These men resided in the nearby city of Vaiśālī (capital of the Vṛji Republic). Vimalakīrti himself is from that same clan and lives "downtown," as Thurman puts it.[29]

That introduces at the outset a geographical and community distinction between the lay *saṃgha* in the city and the ordained *saṃgha* in the countryside, closer to the forest where the religion began.

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[24] Edward Hamlin, "Magical *Upāya* in the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra*," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 11, no. 1 (1988), 89.

[25] Cited by Silk, "Taking the *Vimalakīrtinirdeś*a Seriously," 157.

[26] Gérard Fussman, "Histoire du monde indien: Lecture du texte sanskrit du *Vimalakīrtinirdeś*a," *Cours et travaux du Collège de France*. Résumés 2007-2008. Annuaire 108è année (Paris: Collège de Framce): 646.

[27] Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti: A Mahāyāna Scripture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976). To avoid cumbersome citation, I will use page numbers to refer to this text.

[28] See Wayman, "Buddhism," *Historia Religionum*, 419.

[29] Robert A. F. Thurman, "The Teaching of Vimalakīrti," in *Approaches to the Asian Classics*, eds. William Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 234.

We sense already that there is a "problem of opposites" in this text—indeed, it will be at the heart of the layman's "sermon." The scripture even mentions at its close an alternative title, "Reconciliation of Dichotomies." (102) In fact, two miracles introduce profound "pairs of opposites" at the outset.

The Buddha's Miracles

"One and the Many" The Buddha's own "great gathering" is, of course, impossibly great. This we have come to expect, but among the "thirty-two thousand Bodhisattvas" in attendance, fifty-six are named. This means that the Tibetan version has incorporated, at some point, a fully developed Bodhisattva cult that would have only begun when the Sanskrit was composed. With the Buddha seated upon his "lion throne," five hundred youths step forward with five hundred "precious parasols made of seven different kinds of jewels": "Each approached the Buddha, bowed at his feet, circumambulated him clockwise seven times, laid down his precious parasol in offering, and withdrew to one side." We have seen parasols or umbrellas as a symbol of royal "protection," appearing even in stone at the top of the *stūpa* at Sāñcī. Then, a great miracle:

> As soon as these precious parasols had been laid down, suddenly, by the miraculous power of the Lord, they were transformed into a single precious canopy so great that it formed a covering for this entire billion-world galaxy. The surface of the entire billion-world galaxy was reflected in the interior of the great precious canopy, where the total content of this galaxy could be seen . . . . And the voices of all the Buddhas of the ten directions could be heard proclaiming their teachings of the Dharma in all the worlds, the sounds reverberating in the space beneath the great precious canopy. (12)

Thurman aptly calls this canopy a "magical planetarium."[30]

It is reminiscent of the cosmic vision in the *Aṣṭa* and the beginning of the *Lotus* when a ray from the Buddha's forehead "illuminated" the universe—revealing its vastness, its Buddha-fields, its Buddhas. As before, the congregation is "ecstatic, enraptured, astonished, delighted, satisfied, and filled with awe and pleasure." For now they see that Buddhas are forever present somewhere, that it is possible to seek rebirth among them, while their saving "emanations" are even now in our midst.

A new element, however, may have emerged. While the vision repeats the basic Buddhist theme of "appearance as opposed to reality," it adds the specific lesson that what appears to be "many" is really "one"—i.e., hundreds of parasols give way to one great cosmic canopy. Alan Cole writes that the congregation is being treated here to a "total overview of the Real . . . [a] view of the Real that radically exceeds the boundaries of the participants' expectations."[31] Our translator adds that this vision of "total Reality" is the Buddha's way of correcting our deluded view that we are all separate from each other (like so many different parasols), when in fact we are all "interconnected"

[30] Thurman, "Teaching," 234.

[31] Alan Cole, *Text as Father: Paternal Seductions in Early Mahāyāna Buddhist Literature* (Berkeley: Universtiy of California Press, 2005), 244.

(under one great umbrella). That is reminiscent of the modern Buddhist interpretation of Dependent Origination as "interdependent" origination—that we discussed earlier as not what the Buddha actually taught.

Nevertheless, Thurman—who is a Buddhist—says that if one meditates on this opening image long enough:

> We lose all sense of boundary, all tension of struggle, and experience a vast, sky-like feeling of endless, all-inclusive realness, a realness that gently and unobtrusively seems to be connected to all other beings and things. This is the real self . . . . the essence of what the Buddha saw during his own meditation.[32]

If this is correct, it would mean we have come a long way from the Early Buddhist teaching that we are deluded when we see "whole entities" but wise when we perceive only the "non-self" of different *skandhas* and many *dharmas*. It would mean that the Mahāyāna is teaching the reverse: that we are deluded when we see separate persons and things but wise when we perceive the interconnected whole, that Thurman calls the "real self." The *Vimilakīrti* text, however, does not say this explicitly and does not mention a "real self." But modern Buddhists often report a similar "feeling" of Oneness—that apparently is induced by their meditations.

"Purity and Impurity" Śāriputra thought he saw a problem in the Buddha's miracle—so the Lord performed a second one to solve it. What bothered this Arhat when observing so many Pure Lands of the other Buddhas is that Śākyamuni's own Buddha-field—the one in which he was now preaching to those assembled—was so obviously impure: with its "highs and lows, its thorns, its precipices, its peaks and its abysses, as if it were entirely filled with ordure." (18) It was not a very nice thing to notice. Śākyamuni Buddha had just taught that a Bodhisattva "purifies" a "field" in which he becomes a Buddha by the purity of his own mind produced by his incalculable merits. But this meant, as this Buddhist "doubting Thomas" concluded: "when Gautama was engaged in his career as a bodhisattva, his mind must have been impure."

A curiously Enlightened god steps in and explains: "The fact that you see such a Buddha-field as this as if it were so impure, reverend Śāriputra, is a sure sign that there are highs and lows in your mind and that your positive thought in regard to the Buddha-gnosis is not pure either." In other words, purity is in the mind of the beholder. This is a subjective, even a psychological world view—namely, that the world one "sees" or experiences is the world one gets.

Yet it sits right alongside an objective supernatural cosmology of Buddha-fields and a well-informed god. We saw that ambiguity first in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* when the Lord taught a shining young *deva* that the "beginning and end of the world" is within "this fathom-high carcass"—without denying that god's existence.

That the Buddha is "doubted" reflects the difficulty that the religion is having with Gautama's demotion from the one and only Buddha to just the closest one of innumerable Buddhas in the universe and his demotion—according to Trikāya doctrine—to just a Nirmāṇa-kāya emanation of

[32] Thurman, *Inner Revolution*, 81.

the Dharma-kāya. Commentators made several attempts to restore their Lord's reputation. One was to suggest that the traditional teaching site of "Vulture Peak" was itself not what it seemed but something of a "mini-Pure Land," as Harvey puts it.[33] That allowed Śākyamuni the more exalted status of a Saṃbhoga-kāya with his "Thirty-two Marks" retained. Another solution was to say he actually resided as a Saṃbhoga-kāya in Akaniṣṭha heaven—the highest of the Pure Abodes in the Realm of Form—pressed into service as a "Pure Land" within the Mahāyāna. It is there that his name is Vairocana ("resplendent") who has sent a compassionate "emanation" named Siddhārtha Gautama to India in the sixth century BCE to teach on Vulture Peak. But others argued that Gautama Buddha was himself superior to all other Buddhist Beings by being willing and able to teach in our own "impure" world. What compassion!

In the *Vimalakīrti*, however, the Lord settles the matter this way:

> Thereupon the Lord touched the ground of this billion-world-galactic universe with his big toe [ostensibly, the least pure part of his body], and suddenly it was transformed into a huge mass of precious jewels, a magnificent array of many hundreds of thousands of clusters of precious gems, until it resembled the [undoubtedly pure] universe of the Tathāgata Ratnavyūya . . . . Everyone in the entire assembly was filled with wonder, each perceiving himself seated on a throne of jeweled lotuses. (18-19)

Chastened, Śāriputra exclaims: "I see it Lord!" We learn that the opposition of "impurity and purity" has been resolved in favor of one side of the pair—the revelation that impurity is an illusion and Purity is real. One has the impression that the same is true with the opposition of "many and one," the many only apparent and in reality united by a single overarching principle.

This is not, however, the main or most important way that the *Vimilakīrti* "reconciles dichotomies." To anticipate, our text is closer to the *Aṣṭa* and other "Perfection of Wisdom" literature: namely, when faced with a pair of opposites or *dvaya* ("twoness") occasioned by discursive thinking, one should realize that "neither one nor the other" is true. One should realize *nir-dvandva* ("not two-ness") beyond either side.

Jungian thoughts The problem of the "One and the Many" belongs to what is often called "perennial philosophy" and a theme that keeps coming up in Western thought. The early Greeks wrestled with it and became convinced that the "many" objects of the world are held together by "one" principle—that the pre-Socratic philosophers called variously, Water, Fire, Mind, etc. In the third century CE, Plotinus would say that there is a divine "One" emanating itself into the "many" in an increasing multiplicity that eventually reaches us. It is an idea or attitude that influences even modern-day science. Physicists are not content with observing the many particles and forces of the natural world but seek a "grand unifying theory" that holds them all together. There was much excitement recently upon the discovery of a fundamental particle called the Higgs boson that some scientists dubbed the "God particle." But, then, the Mahāyāna Buddhists appear to be saying that the Dharma-kāya is that One primordial "Particle" responsible for all else.

[33] Harvey, *Introduction*, 166-167.

Jung would say there is a hidden psychology in all of this. We cannot live in meaningless *chaos* and are obliged to seek a *cosmos* of order and meaningful purpose. Thus, the ego functions as the "one" ordering center of consciousness for its "many" contents, lest they overwhelm. At the profounder level of the collective unconscious, the Self archetype functions as the "one" organizing principle for the "many" other archetypes—lest they merely conflict with each other. Jung even speaks of this archetype in language like Thurman's: "the One who dwells within him, whose form has no knowable boundaries, who encompasses him on all sides, fathomless as the abysms of the earth and vast as the sky." [34]

But even if one were to experience this archetype of Order rather directly—in spontaneous vison or induced by meditation—it is not the "whole" of psychic reality since archetype and ego belong together, in a creative relationship: whereby the Self supports ego consciousness and consciousness actualizes the Self's potential. In other words, the opposites of the "one and the many" belong together and cannot be resolved in favor of one or the other.

Similarly—with regard to the pair, "purity and impurity"—Jung would be wary of judging one side more real than the other. Concerning the related pair, "good and evil," Jung strongly criticized the Christian notion of the *privatio boni* that seeks to define "evil" merely as the absence or privation of what is good. That, he felt, does not give sufficient weight to what is bad or evil—contrary to our own experience, especially in recent centuries of world-wide war. He writes:

> And just as the conscious mind can put the question, "Why is there this frightful conflict between good and evil?" so the unconscious can reply, "Look closer! Each needs the other. The best, just because it is the best, holds the seed of evil, and there is nothing so bad but good can come of it."[35]

This understanding does approach Chinese wisdom, the Taoist image of all opposites as "Yin and Yang"—with a "seed" of each depicted inside the other.

Vimalakīrti

Let us meet our titular hero. Since a Mahāyānist, Vimilakīrti is by definition a Bodhisattva—but a lay Bodhisattva living in the city with a wife and children and engaged in some sort of business, handling money unlike a monk for whom that is forbidden. He is, also, something of a man about town since he visits the local bars and houses of prostitution, off limits even to the thoughts of the ordained. For all that, Vimalakīrti is extraordinarily wise and often put forward—especially by modern lay Buddhists—as a kind of proof that it is possible to become Enlightened without becoming a monk or nun. Reginald Ray thinks the scripture teaches that it is actually "preferable" not to renounce.[36] Indeed, the Arhat Upāli enthuses: "Do not entertain the notion that he is a mere householder! Why? With the exception of the Tathāgata himself, there is no disciple or bodhisattva

[34] Jung, *CW* 11, par. 758.
[35] Jung, *CW* 7, par. 289.
[36] Ray, *Buddhist Saints*, 414.

capable of competing with his eloquence or rivaling the brilliance of his wisdom." (31) We see that, at the very least, this man in layman's white rivals Śākaymuni, the Buddha in saffron robes outside of town.

When closely read, however, the text makes it difficult to say who or what Vimilakīrti actually is:

> At that time, there lived in the great city of Vaiśālī a certain Licchavi, Vimalakīrti by name. Having served the ancient Buddhas, he had generated the roots of virtue by honoring them and making offering to them. He had attained tolerance as well as eloquence. He played with the great superknowledges [*abhijñās*, including the *ṛddhis*]. He had attained the power of incantations [*dhāraṇī*, short scriptural formulae; or strings of potent sounds] and the fearlessnesses. He had conquered all demons and opponents. He had penetrated the profound way of the Dharma. He was liberated through the transcendence of wisdom [i.e., the Perfection of Wisdom]. . . . In order to develop living beings with his skill in liberative technique [Means], he lived in the great city of Vaiśālī. (20)

We see why Upāli is excited. This man is not newly converted but has been a Bodhisattva from aeons past, cultivating the Perfections and gaining thereby his own miraculous powers. Although an earthly human being and presumably even "earthy," this lay Bodhisattva might even be as advanced as a Celestial Bodhisattva. Or perhaps more than that since the text reads, "liberated by the Perfection of Wisdom," the goal of the religion.

Fussman cannot resist: "*Vimalkīrti est un tathāgata*."[37] As we read on in scripture, we see why he would say that:

> He wore the white clothes of the layman, yet lived impeccably like a religious devotee. He lived at home, but remained aloof from the realm of desire, the realm of pure matter, and the immaterial realm [the Three Realms of the cosmos]. He had a son, a wife, and female attendants [i.e., a harem], yet always maintained continence. He appeared to be surrounded by servants, yet lived in solitude. He appeared to be adorned with ornaments, yet always was endowed with the auspicious signs and marks. He seemed to eat and drink, yet always took nourishment from the taste of meditation. He made his appearance in the fields of sports and in the casinos, but his aim was always to mature those people who were attached to games and gambling. . . . To demonstrate the evils of desire, he even entered the brothels. To established drunkards in correct mindfulness, he entered all the cabarets. (20-21)

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[37] Fussman, *Histoire*, 648.

Vimalakīrti appears to be one thing but, we are told, is really another. This rich man of Vaiśāli, has a wife and child and concubines, yet is somehow always chaste; has many servants yet is always alone; goes into bars but only to preach against going there.

Some of this makes sense, the way that a Methodist minister is "in the world but not of it" and goes into bars to preach against demon drink. As one writer puts it, "Vimalakīrti's own personal ethical conduct is flawless."[38] On the other hand, some of this looks paradoxical as in the phrase, "He seemed to eat and drink, yet . . . ." We are reminded of docetic Nirmāṇa-kāyas who eat and drink but only to conform to what is expected of their human "disguise." True, the force of any contradiction in the text depends on how one translates. Watson's rendering from the Chinese is not quite paradoxical: e.g., "although he ate and drank like others, what he truly savored was the joy of meditation."[39] Still, it is not actually clear what to think of Vimalakīrti.

The scripture maintains all manner of ambiguities until very late. Let us go there:

> The venerable Śāriptutra then asked the Buddha, "Lord, in which Buddha-field did the noble Vimalakīrti die, before reincarnating in this Buddha field?"
> The Buddha said, "Śāriputra, ask this good man directly where he died to reincarnate here." (92)

The Arhat does so but receives a standard "Perfection of Wisdom" answer from Vimalakīrti—namely, that there is "nothing that dies or is reborn," any more than in a magical trick something real appears and disappears. So the Buddha has to intervene:

> "Śāriputra, this holy person came here from the presence of the Tathāgata Akṣobhya in the universe Abhirati." (93)

The text clarifies at last: Vimalakīrti is a Celestial Bodhisattva who usually resides in the eastern Pure Land of Abhirati to serve the Celestial Buddha, Akṣobhya. He has come into our midst as an "emanation" to satisfy his Vow to save all beings, using whatever *upāya* necessary—including seeming to be a mere layman in India—to further that goal.

It follows that Vimalakīrti is and is not a human being, is and is not a householder, a Bodhisattva, a Buddha. We cannot even be certain that he is here. It follows, too, that the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* is no sure "proof" that it is preferable to be a layperson, rather than a monk or a nun, in order to become Enlightened.

Vimalakīrti's Illness

Early in the scripture, Vimalakīrti determined it would be a good salvific "strategy" to appear ill: "At that time, out of this very skill in liberative technique, Vimalakīrti manifested himself as if sick." (21) That is, he was not really sick but pretended to be in order to get the townsfolk in the

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[38] Robinson, et al., *Buddhist Religions*, 113.
[39] Watson, *Vimalakirti*, 33.

thousands to visit him and inquire after his health. It is another one of those holy "lies" that appear in Mahāyāna materials, giving this man an opportunity to teach the following:

> Friends, this body is so impermanent, fragile, unworthy of confidence, and feeble. . . . This body is like a ball of foam, unable to bear any pressure. It is like a water bubble, not remaining very long. It is like a mirage, born from the appetites of the passions. It is like the trunk of the plantain tree, having no core. Alas! This body is like a machine, a nexus of bones and tendons. It is like a magical illusion, consisting of falsifications. It is like a dream, being an unreal vision. . . . Therefore, you should be revulsed by such a body. You should despair of it and should arouse your admiration for the body of the Tathāgata. (22)

This teaching is not in the least paradoxical but Early Buddhist orthodoxy. It exhibits that "revulsion" toward the physical—leading to a psychological detachment—that I have argued is the purpose of such a dim view of the body. By contrast, says Vimalakīrti, there is the "body of the Tathāgata" (nascent Trikāya theory).

Then, Vimalakīrti complains: "I am sick, lying on my bed in pain, yet the Tathāgata, the saint, the perfectly accomplished Buddha, does not consider me or take pity upon me, and sends no one to inquire after my illness." (24) This is humorous, the beginning of a wry streak in what are called the "Reluctance" chapters. Of course, the Buddha across town in Āmrapāli Park has not inquired—because Vimalkīrti is not really sick! Nor should an advanced Bodhisattva be complaining. Nevertheless, the Lord plays along and directs his ten most accomplished "Hīnayāna" disciples to look in on the patient.

Shockingly, they all refuse to go: "reluctant" to encounter a layman who in previous encounters had belittled their ostensibly perfect understanding of the Dharma. Poor Śāriputra is the first to explain:

> I remember one day, when I was sitting at the foot of a tree in the forest, absorbed in contemplation, the Licchavi Vimalkīrti came to the foot of that tree and said to me, "Reverend Śāriputra, this is not the way to absorb yourself in contemplation. You should absorb yourself in contemplation so that neither body nor mind appear anywhere in the triple world. You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you can manifest all ordinary behavior without forsaking cessation. . . . You should absorb yourself in contemplation in such a way that you are released in liberation without abandoning the passions that are the province of the world." (24)

The Arhat's contemplation had been rudely interrupted by a Mahāyāna teaching on the Nirvāṇa of "no fixed abode." Teaching is, after all, why Vimilakīrti left the ideal world of Abhirati for this Sahā world, why he lives in town.

Rudeness aside, this explanation may make too much rational sense. Cole thinks the "pairs of opposites" are actually at play in order to elude any comprehension. He writes of Vimalakīrti's challenges to all the disciples that they "are of one type":

> they require that opposites be combined. Of course, this matches the description that the omniscient narrator had given Vimalakīrti himself, since he was a layman but behaved like a buddha and so on.[40]

But, Cole adds, combining opposites is actually "impossible," leading to "unthinkability"—i.e., to the eventual goal of seeing "nonduality" beyond all concepts.

We soon learn that Vimalakīrti also interrupted the great Arhat Maudgalyāyana who was teaching the Dharma: "that is not the way to teach the Dharma to the householders in their white clothes . . . . there is no teacher of the Dharma, no one to listen, no one to understand." This sounds like the *Aṣṭa*. Vimalakīrti also scolded Mahākāśyapa who was on his alms round: "You should beg your food in awareness of the ultimate nonexistence of food." For good measure, this mere layman—who is not supposed to know so much—commented on Nirvāṇa in a very clever way: "That which is without intrinsic substance and without imparted substance does not burn. And what does not burn will not be extinguished." In other words, Saṃsāra (being on fire with desires) does not really exist (so one cannot really be on fire); therefore, there is no need for Nirvāṇa (the "blowing out" of fire) nor is it even possible. We will see that kind of relentless demolition of thought in the Madhyamaka philosophy of Nāgārjuna.

These tales of humiliation go on repeatedly until we get to my favorite, featuring Ānanda. He has always been something of a "fall guy" in Buddhism since scriptures often point out that he is "still in training." At the same time, Ānanda is Gautama Buddha's favorite attendant—another play of opposites. In the story, the Lord was physically "indisposed," so he sent his personal assistant to get some milk for his stomach. But Vimalakīrti stopped him on the way to introduce "Dharma-body" theory:

> Reverend Ānanda, the Tathāgatas have the body of the Dharma—not a body that is sustained by material food. The Tathāgatas have a transcendental body that has transcended all mundane qualities. There is no injury to the body of a Tathāgata, as it is rid of all defilements. . . . Reverend Ānanda, to believe there can be illness in such a body is irrational and unseemly!"

Ānanda reported this embarrassing encounter to the Buddha as the reason why he, too, was reluctant to go to the city:

> When I had heard these words, I wondered if I had previously misheard and misunderstood the Buddha, and I was very much ashamed. Then I heard a voice

[40] Cole, *Text as Father*, 257.

> from the sky: "Ānanda! The householder speaks to you truly. Nevertheless . . . go and get the milk!"

There is much religious mischief in all this and a fair amount of fantasy, worthy of the *Chuang Tzu*. And we see why Ch'an (Zen) with its own religious mischief ("the sound of one hand clapping") values this particular scripture—despite claiming to be "outside scripture" (more mischief). Scholars still argue, however, whether any of this is actually funny—which is funny.

Mañjuśrī to the Rescue

Finally, the Celestial Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī agrees to visit (his fellow Celestial Bodhisattva) Vimalakīrti on his sickbed: "although he cannot be withstood by someone of my feeble defenses, still, sustained by the grace of the Buddha, I will go to him and will converse with him as well as I can." (42) Anticipating a grand spectacle, all those surrounding the throne of the Lord rise and accompany this wisest of all Gautama Buddha's followers, heading for the imaginary invalid's room.

By tradition, it measured ten by ten feet—the exact size adopted by certain abbots and "retired scholars" in China for their own private rooms. But how would the hundreds of thousands of visitors fit into such a small space? Easily—because it would be "empty"!

> Then, magically his house became empty. Even the doorkeeper disappeared. And, except for the invalid's couch upon which Vimalakīrti himself was lying, no bed or couch or seat could be seen anywhere. (43)

Unfortunately for him, Śāriputra asked about seats—to which Vimalakīrti retorted: "did you come here for the sake of the Dharma? Or did you come here for the sake of a chair?" (50)

More to the point, what did Vimalakīrti and Mañjuśrī discuss? They discussed the Mahāyāna notion of "emptiness," of course:

> Householder, why is your house empty? Why have you no servants?
> Mañjuśrī, all buddha-fields are also empty.
> What makes them empty?
> They are empty because of emptiness.
> What is "empty" about emptiness?
> Constructions are empty, because of emptiness.
> Can emptiness be conceptually constructed?
> Even that concept is itself empty, and emptiness cannot construct emptiness. (43-44)

Not only is the rich householder's house empty of servants and furniture, it is also void of concepts—even concepts about conceptualization. The story is itself a "means" (an *upāya* or "strategy) to clear the mind of all preconceived thoughts, all "dualism"—opening it to "nondualism," left necessarily

undefined. As we know, nondualism cannot be expressed by dualistic language, but—as we have just been witnessing—it can be expressed by fantasy.

That, I think, explains "Vimalakīrti" best: not a model for how to become Enlightened in any of his purported roles but, instead, a fantasy figure of the goal itself. He symbolizes the nondual transcendence of all opposites. Jonathan Silk puts it well:

> Vimalakīrti is an effective spokesman for the principle of non-duality precisely because he himself *embodies* the idea of the paradoxical reality of impossibility. . . . that to really understand the true nature of reality we must transcend such seemingly ordinary dichotomous truths, seeing through the apparent impossibility to the profoundly non-dual, the only true reality, the "really real."[41]

It is this same symbolic mode of expression that we find "embodied" in myth, fairy tale, and dream. Symbolism allows the psyche to say things without "saying" anything at all.

A Transgender Fantasy

Surprisingly—or not at all—a "goddess" (*devatā*) has been living in Vimalakīrti's "empty" house. Suddenly, she appears. And Śāriputra, true to form, asks her why she does not transform herself out of her "female state" since Buddhahood is not open to that gender:

> Thereupon, the goddess employed her magical power to cause the elder Śāriputra to appear in her form and to cause herself to appear in his form. . . . And Śāriputra, transformed into the goddess, replied, "I no longer appear in the form of a male! My body has changed into the body of a woman!" (61-62)

Noting the Arhat's panic, Paul Williams quips: "The poor monk was no doubt concerned about all the Vinaya rules he was unavoidably infringing!"[42] Besides, a female body is inferior in Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism and the product of much unresolved "bad karma." Here, then, is yet another humorous play of the pairs of opposites.

Compassionately, the goddess reversed her demonstration of "nondualism," putting Śāriputra's mind and body at rest. Lest her point be missed, she explained about "women" as a conceptual category: "While they are not women in reality, they appear in the form of women. With this in mind, the Buddha said, 'In all things, there is neither male nor female.'" Since that is exactly what the Celestial Bodhisattva Tārā said in the previous chapter—and since we were not sure of her actual religious status—it may be that Tārā is the "Buddha" being quoted. Perhaps She is this household deity. Or not.

The *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* keeps playing with our expectations, loosening the cramp of thinking we can "grasp" the contents bubbling up out of the collective unconscious for our personal benefit.

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[41] Silk, "Taking the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa* Seriously," 176. Silk's italics.

[42] Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 154.

Proto-Tantra?

Earlier, I criticized Buddhism's inability to accept the "mud" in which the "lotus" must stay rooted in order to grow into the "light" of consciousness. It is a limitation of all spiritual religions that cannot come to terms with the natural body, sex, emotions, the everyday—except to control what is natural or even deny it. At one point, however, the *Vimalakīrti* appears to correct its own "spiritual" prejudice. Mañjuśrī says to the householder:

> Noble sir, flowers like the blue lotus, the red lotus, the white lotus, the water lily, and the moon lily do not grow on the dry ground in the wilderness, but do grow in the swamps and mud banks. Just so, the buddha-qualities do not grow in living beings certainly destined for the uncreated but do grow in those living beings who are like swamps and mud banks of passions. . . . without going into the great ocean, it is impossible to find precious, priceless pearls. Likewise, without going into the ocean of passions, it is impossible to obtain the mind of omniscience. (66)

These are wise words with which, at first glance, Jung would agree. Vimalakīrti even goes a step farther, transgressively: "when the bodhisattva follows the wrong way, he follows the way to attain the qualities of the Buddha." (64)

Thurman sees Buddhist Tantra in this since that style of the religion, emerging centuries later, is sometimes called the transgressive "path of passion." He writes:

> Vimalakīrti's method in integrating the intellectual and behavior dichotomies is one of the many blatant hints of Tantric ideas in the background of his teaching method . . . . The concept of the adept using paths generally considered evil for the attainment of enlightenment and the Buddha-qualities is basic in Tantric doctrine and practice. (7)

"Integrating" should mean individuation—bringing the opposites of the one and the many, the pure and the impure, good and evil, male and female, closer together so that one's psyche is not always so "split" and in conflict.

Yet the following is what Vimalakīrti actually proposes as the "wrong way":

> Even should he enact the five deadly sins, he feels no malice, violence, or hate. Even should he go into the hells, he remains free of all taint of passions. Even should he go into the states of the animals, he remains free of darkness and ignorance. [etc. through each of the six Destinies] He may follow the ways of desire, yet he stays free of attachment to the enjoyments of desire . . . He may show the ways of the passions, yet he is utterly dispassionate and naturally pure. (64-65)

This is like the scripture's introduction to this wise layman who proved to be in the world but, upon close reading, not really of it.

Vimalakīrti is describing here the compassionate acts of a Celestial Bodhisattva who is able to go into all the Destinies to save others. We have learned from the *Lotus* that this may even require acts of "compassionate violence." But that is not actually a path of integration and more like Docetism. Yes, the highly skilled lay Bodhisattva may show the "way of the passions," but he himself is "utterly dispassionate"—and has not learned how to be, at the same time, a "passionate" man in some way. His behavior remains "flawless" and in no way touched by the "mud."

Besides, the household "goddess" explains that any particular teaching is never true but merely the opposite of a disciple's condition—in order to relativize all teachings and to reveal their "emptiness." She says:

> Liberation is freedom from desire, hatred, and folly—that is the teaching for the excessively proud. But those free of pride are taught that the very nature of desire, hatred, and folly is itself liberation. (60)

And, finally, it is somewhat misleading to refer to "Tantra" in general as a "path of passion." The label suggests antinomian or transgressive acts that are found only in a late form of Buddhist Tantra, called the Anuttarayoga. It is reserved for the very few and not condoned by earlier forms of Buddhist Tantra—forms that succeeded outside India. Tibet, however, did accept the Anuttarayoga while modifying it.

Thunderous Silence

In the chapter called the "Dharma-door to Nonduality," Vimalkīrti asks the many highly advanced Celestial Bodhisattvas who had kindly visited him during his "illness" their own view of "duality." They reply variously and correctly:

> "'I' and 'mine' are two. If there is no presumption of a self, there will be no possessiveness."
> "'Defilement' and 'purification' are two."
> "'Grasping and 'nongrasping' are two."
> "'Good' and 'evil' are two. Seeking neither good nor evil, the understanding of the nonduality of the significant and the meaningless is the entrance into nonduality." (73-74)

And so on. To which Mañjuśrī himself replies correctly:

> Good sirs, you have all spoken well. Nevertheless, all your explanations are themselves dualistic. To know no one teaching, to express nothing, to say nothing, to explain nothing, to announce nothing, to indicate nothing, and to designate nothing—that is the entrance into nonduality. (77)

And turning to Vimalakīrti, the wise Celestial Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī asks the presumably ordinary lay Bodhisattva his own view on nonduality:

> Thereupon, the Licchavi Vimalkīrti kept his silence, saying nothing at all.

This is not the silence of being dumbfounded, like that of Śāriputra who did not know what to say, but of knowing the limits of language. Thus, it is often called the "thunderous silence" of Vimalakīrti—or it is an advanced version of the "Lion's Roar." Unable to contain himself, Mañjuśrī exclaimed in words:

> Excellent! Excellent, noble sir! This is indeed the entrance into the nonduality of the bodhisattvas. Here there is no use for syllables, sounds, and ideas.

Or, as the Taoist *Chuang Tzu* puts it, "The Great Way is not named."[43] Enough said.

"Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra"

Although the *Vimalakīrti Sūtra* teaches at its close an apophatic lesson—one with which we are familiar—it does so within a larger kataphatic "story," more like the *Lotus* with its parables. As Caroline Rhys Davids might say, it proclaims the "Sea." This is also how Joan Sutherland, a Zen Buddhist, understands the scripture:

> In the koan tradition, when we're presented with an apparent duality, we resolve it not by choosing A or B but by looking for C, that unexpected thing that can embrace both A and B and create something new from them. In this sutra, Vimalakirti himself is C, the reconciliation of the opposites.[44]

That sounds like my earlier argument about "three" Truths in Budddhism, with C not expressed in Early Buddhism. In any case, the *Tathāgata-garbha Sūtra* ("Sermon on the Embryo/Womb of the Tathāgata") is itself all C. Composed in the third century, the text is a short compilation of religious images and so unsophisticated philosophically that the word, "emptiness," does not even appear—even though composed later than several Mahāyāna texts that feature the term.

The author(s) would have studied these more complex teachings but chose not to respond: except for the opening image that seems contrived and likely added as a ninth image to an earlier set of eight symbols that express from different angles this scripture's message. The opening ninth image is also treated as analogy—referring to what is already known in other terms—while the set of symbols are more naïve, at once easier to explain and more difficult, crackling with the numinosity of divine revelation. They are what one imagines hearing in the *samādhi* of the *Pratyutpanna* when

43 Burton Watson, trans., *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 39.

44 Joan Sutherland, *Vimalakirti and the Awakened Heart: A Commentary on "The Sutra that Vimalakirti Speaks"* (Santa Fe: Following Wind Press, 2016), 8-9.

"face-to-face" with the Lord and hearing new things. According to the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, the new thing is the Buddha's revelation, "I am within you"—as an "Embryo."

Perhaps, it is not new and what had always been implied by the religion, but the *via negativa* would not say. That there is a Buddha within does not mean that Buddhas are not still residing outside, in Pure Lands far beyond our own. Indeed, a myriad of Bodhisattvas, more numerous than "sixty times the number of sands in the Ganges River," arrive from countless Buddha-fields to listen to the *sūtra*. Nor does the new teaching mean that a Buddha does not reside in history, outside Rājagṛha in India, where this sermon is being taught. It does mean, as one of the text's translators, Michael Zimmermann, writes: "the underlying tendency here is to redirect emphasis to the internalization of religious values."[45]

Unlike the *Vimalakīrti*, the *Tathāgatagarbha* is not *sui generis* but one of a genre of about a dozen Sanskrit texts proclaiming the value of religious "internality." One of these texts is the Mahāyāna version of the *Mahā-parinirvāṇa Sūtra* (not to be confused with the *sūtra* of the same name in the *Digha Nikāya*). That text is also longer and more complex, trying to solve intellectual problems arising from the new symbol. Another scripture in this genre is the *Śrīmālā-devī-siṃhanāda Sūtra* ("Sermon on the Lion's Roar of Queen Śrīmālā") dating from the third century. It is famous not only for its technical discussion of the "Embryo" but for its being taught by a female Bodhisattva of the court. That scripture strongly influenced the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* ("Sermon on the Descent from Laṅka") composed in the fourth century. And, in turn, the *Laṅkāvatāra* became an authoritative scripture for Ch'an Buddhism in China, then Zen in Japan—traditions that rely heavily upon the doctrine (or image) of a *tathāgatagarbha* within.

These East Asian traditions, however, prefer to use a synonym that appears in our text—*buddha-dhātu* ("Buddha-element" or "Buddha-nature")—and that, as we shall see, has influenced their interpretation of what is being taught. Let me note that there is no extant Sanskrit manuscript of the text we will be considering, but there are very early translations of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* in Chinese and Tibetan. I will be using William Grosnick's rendering from the Chinese when quoting the scripture itself but refer, as needed, to Michael Zimmermann's translation from the Tibetan.[46]

Tathāgata-garbha

We already know that Siddhārtha Gautama preferred the epithet *tathāgata* when referring to himself, suggesting that he was self-conscious of being in a long line of Enlightened Ones. The Sanskrit is ambiguous, however, with two possible meanings: "thus come" (*tathā-āgata*) and "thus gone" (*tathā-gata*)—meaning that all Buddhas have "come" into Saṃsāra and "gone" into Nirvāṇa the same way. Or so it would seem, the Mahāyāna might add.

The second half of this new technical compound is also ambiguous. The primary meaning of *garbha* is "embryo, fetus, child." But it can also mean, "uterus, womb," that which contains and nurtures an embryo. Both meanings derive from biology and belong to a cluster of related

[45] Michael Zimmermann, *A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatagarbhasūtra* (Tokyo: International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2002), 33.

[46] Grosnick, *Tathāgatagarbha*, 92-106. To avoid cumbersome citation, I will refer to the text by page numbers.

symbolism in the history of religions: "sacred marriage," "fertility," "gestation," "birth," and especially "rebirth." As true symbols, they point to something known and unknown, yet sacred—for which better expressions cannot be found.

We should sense in the background our previous discussion of symbolic "motherhood": Māyā as the mysterious "Mother" of the historical Buddha and Prajñāpāramitā as the "Mother of all Buddhas." Gautama Buddha himself was said to have "given birth" to his disciples as "sons and daughters." The new genre of Buddhist scriptures could be saying that all this earlier imagery anticipates its own more explicitly "internal" revelation.

To say that *garbha* means "embryo" points to the process of spiritual development—as during the Twelve Acts of a Buddha, through Ten Stages of a Bodhisattva, over three incalculable aeons—an entirely orthodox reference to the Buddhist Path. To say that *garbha* means "womb," however, raises the question of where that "embryo" would be growing. The *Tathāgatagarbha* scripture states that it grows "within sentient beings" in general and, a bit more precisely, "within the body" of sentient beings.

Other texts of the genre are clearer that the nurturing location of the Buddha "embryo" is "within the mind." The Tibetan commentator, Mkhas-grub-rje, summarized the literature by stating: "it has been in the stream of consciousness [*citta-saṃtāṇa*] of all sentient beings since beginningless 'cycles of life' . . . ."[47] We saw much earlier in this book that this ever-changing "stream" was viewed by some as the inherently "luminous" (*prabhāsvara*) mind of Early Buddhist scripture or perhaps the passive *bhavāṅga* mind of Abhidharma. It does not surprise, therefore, that the *tathāgatagarbha* is being added to an ever lengthening discussion of the mental life.

Incidentally, the dome of a Buddhist *stūpa* that contains the Lord's relics within is called in Indian architecture that structure's *garbha* or "womb." In Hindu temple architecture, the inner sanctuary where the image of a god is kept is called the *garbha-gṛha*, "womb house" or, perhaps, "house of the embryo."

Introduction

The scripture begins as usual:

> Thus have I heard. At one time the Buddha was staying on the Vulture Peak near Rājagṛha in the lecture hall of a many-tiered pavilion built of fragrant sandalwood. He had attained Buddhahood ten years previously and was accompanied by an assembly of hundreds and thousands of great monks and a throng of bodhisattvas and great beings sixty times the number of sands in the Ganges River. . . . All could turn the irreversible wheel of the dharma. If a being were to hear their names, he would become irreversible in the highest path. (94)

We actually hear those powerful names—apparently as an act of "grace"—in a long paragraph. Then, as usual, the Lord performs a miracle in the form of a great vision for his worshippers:

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[47] Lessing and Wayman, *Mkhas-grub-rje's "Fundamentals*," 49.

> At that time, the Buddha sat up straight in meditation in the sandalwood pavilion and, with his supernatural powers, put on a miraculous display. There appeared in the sky a countless number of thousand-petaled lotus flowers as large as chariot wheels, filled with colors and fragrances that one could not begin to enumerate. In the center of each flower was a conjured image of a buddha. The flowers rose and covered the heavens like a jeweled banner, each flower giving forth countless rays of light. The petals all simultaneously unfolded their splendor and then, through the Buddha's miraculous powers, all withered in an instant. Within the flowers all the buddha images sat cross-legged in lotus position, and each issued forth countless hundreds of thousands of rays of light.

And the whole assembly "rejoiced and danced ecstatically."

They, also, wondered what it all meant. Specifically, the text says: they "all began to wonder why all the countless wonderful flowers should suddenly be destroyed. As they withered and darkened, the smell they gave off was foul and loathsome." (95) This is the contrived part of the opening image when, otherwise, throughout the history of Buddhism flowers have been entirely positive with showers of them falling at all the great Buddhist moments, the lotus in particular chosen for its outspread beauty. Still, a negative note can appear in the Theravāda ritual of offering flowers before a Buddha image: "I worship the Buddha with these flowers; / May this virtue be helpful for my emancipation; / Just as these flowers fade, / Our body will undergo decay."[48] While that is good doctrine about "impermanence," it is awkward floral symbolism.

The Lord has to explain:

> In a similar fashion, good sons, when I regard all beings with my buddha eye, I see that hidden within the kleśas of greed, desire, anger, and stupidity there is seated augustly and unmovingly the tathāgata's wisdom, the tathāgata's vision, and the tathāgata's body. Good sons, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of kleśas, have a tathāgatagarbha that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with the virtues no different from my own. . . whereas, after the wilted petals have been removed, those tathāgatas are manifested for all to see. (96)

It helps to realize that the vision's innumerable lotuses were closed at first, and it was only when they opened that the seated, meditating "Buddhas" were visible to the congregation.

But, surely, that did not require the flowers' petals to die off—except that the Lord felt obliged to make a point about the *kleśas* or "defilements." They must die off if one is to see what the Buddha sees with his Enlightened "eye." An ethical note is struck as we are told once more that we as sentient beings are impermanent and disgusting. Despite that, we are also told that just inside that outer fragile self, as if within a womb, sits a Great Yogin, the Buddha in eternal contemplation.

[48] Wikipedia contributors, "Offering (Buddhism)," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Offering_(Buddhism)&oldid=1031893319.

Readers of my previous book on Hinduism may recall the image of a seated Yogin on a seal from the Indus Valley Culture and a discussion of its relevance for our own more introverted religious future. Readers of Jung will recall his dream of a country chapel with a "wonderful flower arrangement": "in front of the altar facing me, sat a yogi—in lotus posture, in deep meditation. When I looked at him more closely, I realized that he had my face."[49]

The Tathāgatagarbha is the closest Buddhism comes to Jung's discovery of the Self, the "Greater Personality" within the depths of the psyche. It represents for me the "full flowering" of this religion in India.

The Eight Core Similes

There are other ways to express this Buddhist truth, and the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* does so in a standard set of eight similes, i.e., what it is "like," albeit ultimately ineffable. Here is the usual order that displays no internal logic, a fact that probably means that the images were brought together over time. The "Buddha within" is like:

1. honey in a cave or a tree
2. a kernel of wheat still inside its husk
3. gold fallen into a pit of dung
4. treasure hidden under a house
5. the seed or pit inside a mango
6. a gold statue wrapped in filthy rags
7. a king within the womb of a poor woman
8. a gold statue still inside its blackened mold

I will discuss these at the end of the chapter but will change the order since these eight actually express three archetypal motifs: "Food for the Soul," "The Treasure Hard to Find," and the "Divine Child."

Incorrigibles

As wonderful as the new teaching may have sounded at the time, it generated a number of unforeseen controversies. One concerned a category of sentient being called *icchantika* ("wishful"), persons who are inordinately full of desire—thus, not very religious or Buddhist. In fact, these persons are actively opposed to Buddhism; and a looser translation, "incorrigible," fits.[50] Ming-Wood Liu reports that in the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* (for short, the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*) an *icchantika* is described as:

> "devoid of good roots" and as "the most wicked being." He is depicted as "having no capacity for the true Dharma" such that he can never be rehabilitated by the

[49] Jung, *Memories*, 323.
[50] See "icchantika," *PDB*, 370.

> instruction of the Buddha and so will never attain supreme enlightenment. . . condemned forever to spiritual darkness . . . . [51]

But we just heard from the *Tathāgatagarbha* that "all beings" innately have within them a "Buddha" and, at the very least, the potential for Buddhahood.

In the Early Buddhist *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, there is a famous pessimistic verse: "whether Tathāgatas arise or not, there persists that law, that stableness of the Dharma, that fixed course of the Dharma: 'All conditioned phenomena are impermanent . . . suffering . . . are non-self.'"[52] In a deliberate parallel, the new text reads much more positively: "Whether or not buddhas appear in the world, the tathāgatagarbhas of all beings are eternal and unchanging." (96)

Let us note that this religious optimism is not entirely new. The *Lotus Sūtra* had already proclaimed, centuries earlier, the existence of countless Bodhisattvas who had taken the Bodhicitta Vow to "save all beings;" the Buddha himself prophesied Buddhahood for numerous persons by their new name in that text, even his evil cousin Devadatta—an *icchantika* if there ever was one. And the parable of the "Prodigal Son" with its happy ending appeared to be meant for us all.

It is true, however, that before the Lord preached the *Lotus*, "five thousand straightway rose from their seats and, doing obseisance to the Buddha, withdrew." The scripture explains that: "This group had deep and grave roots of sin and overweening pride, imagining themselves to have attained and to have borne witness to what in fact they had not."[53] They appear to be *icchantikas*.

Liu informs us that the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* can go both ways on this issue. In its earlier chapters, we read:

> All sentient beings possess the Buddha-nature. Due to this nature, they can cut off innumerable billions of bonds of defilements, and attain the most perfect enlightenment. The only exceptions are the *icchantikas*.[54]

Then, later in the same scripture (i.e., later in its chronological compilation) we read:

> What is perfect faith? It comprises believing whole-heartedly that the Buddha, the Dharma and the Saṅgha are eternal, that the Buddhas of the ten directions are the skillful manifestations of the one immutable Tathāgata, and that all sentient beings, *including the icchantikas*, possess the Buddha-nature . . . . [55]

And it is this latter, more generous, attitude that became most influential in East Asia.

The controversy persisted, however, as we observe with the famous "Mu" *kōan* of the Japanese Zen tradition:

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[51] Ming-Wood Liu, "The Problem of the *Icchantika* in the Mahāyāna *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*," *The Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 7, no.1 (1984): 58-59.

[52] Bodhi, *AN* 3.136 (p.p. 363-364). Regularized to Sanskrit.

[53] Hurvitz, *Lotus Blossom*, 29.

[54] Liu, "Problem," 64.

[55] Liu, "Problem," 71. Liu's emphasis.

> A student asked: "Does a dog also have Buddha-nature or not? The Master said, "It does not" [Jap., *mu*, "no"].

Then, the commentaries began: Why would the master say that? Everybody knows that all sentient beings, dogs, even trees—and possibly even insentient objects like rocks and roof tiles—have *buddha-dhātu*. Did he just say the opposite of what we expected to hear in order to loosen our attachment to understanding? And on and on.[56]

Sudden or Gradual Enlightenment

A second controversy concerned Enlightenment: Was it experienced gradually or suddenly? We have been witnessing the traditional "gradual" approach for several chapters—how one must make a special vow in the presence of a Buddha, how that vow as seed grows over time to produce its inevitable fruit through Three Trainings or Ten Stages, and in most cases over vast periods of time. True, we also witnessed at the close of Gautama Buddha's first sermons some "sudden" attainments of Arhathood; but they were either exceptional or symbolic of the power of the Lord's voice and charismatic presence.

Now, a faction of Buddhists claimed that a gradual attainment was the wrong way to understand this experience—given their reading of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*. They noticed that the "lotus petals" of the text's introduction were "withered in an instant" and that the "ecstatic" congregation suddenly saw the new truth of their "Buddha-nature." Why assume the experience is otherwise? Whether or not this issue was important for Indian Buddhists is not clear; but it was very important for Chinese Buddhists.

This we know from a quasi-historical "debate" held at Bsam yas, the first Buddhist monastery of Tibet, in the eighth century CE. The Chinese proponent of the "sudden" position spoke first:

> If you commit virtuous or non-virtuous deeds, because you go to heavens and hells, you still are not liberated from *saṃsāra*. . . . Whoever does not think anything [i.e., has no discriminating concepts during meditation] . . . is instantaneously enlightened. He is the equal to one who has mastered the tenth *bhūmi*.[57]

That *bhūmi* or Stage of a Bodhisattva is, as we have seen, tantamount in Mahāyāna to being a Buddha.

In his response, the Indian scholar Kamalaśīla—recently arrived from his teaching post at Nālandā—pointed out that Gautama Buddha taught a "gradual" Eightfold Path, that meditation was only one of the Three Trainings, and there was real danger of antinomianism in treating "virtuous and non-virtuous deeds" with equal disregard. The Tibetan king who had called the debate declared this Indian "gradual" side the winner and exiled the "sudden" faction, establishing henceforth Tibetan Buddhism's preference for Indian influence. We should note, however, a typical unholy mix of

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[56] See Robert Sharf, "On the Buddha-nature of Insentient Things," unfinished essay, University of Michigan, http://www.buddhism.org/kr/koan/Robert_Sharf-e.htm

[57] Williams, *Mahāyāna*, 194.

politics and religion—the king of Tibet was at war with China and could ill afford that the Chinese religious position win.

Recent scholarship on the so-called "Bsam yas debate" has shown a softer polarity on the issues. The "sudden" side was actually argued by monks who had been following a "gradual" path of renouncing family life, following the Vinaya rules, etc; while the "gradual" side never denied that at the end of a long spiritual journey, one finally and "suddenly" realized Omniscence. When Japanese Zen refined its own "sudden" position—derived from the Chinese—they would speak of *kenshō* as an initial "sudden" glimpse into the truth of Buddha-nature, to be cultivated "gradually" over time—with additional *kenshō* experiences—before a more definitive experience of *satori* or Bodhi. This initial "glimpse" reminds us of becoming a "Stream-winner" in Early Buddhism, after which one would eventually "flow" on toward Nirvāṇa.

Although the East Asian refinement shifts the original Indian pattern from "gradual-then-sudden" to "sudden-then-gradual," it reveals a pair of opposites in the religious life that is apparently unavoidable. Calvinist Christians speak of getting "born again" decisively all of a sudden, but then having to mature that experience in a lifelong process of "sanctification." Jungian analysis is not particularly interested in sudden experiences as much as in a gradual change in one's attitude, even one's world view. There are "breakthroughs" along the way, however, that one can even date in a journal.

Tathāgatagarbha as Ātman

The new genre of scriptures stirred yet another controversy that was much more highly charged: Does the revelation of a "Tathāgata-garbha" or "Buddha-dhātu" within all or most sentient beings, seen suddenly or otherwise, imply a "self" when Buddhism had long been committed to "non-self"? The possibility was almost alarming. In the sixth century, the Mahāyānist Bhāvaviveka listed among the attacks by Hīnayānists: "because the Mahāyāna teaches that the *tathāgatagarbha* is all pervasive, it does not relinquish the belief in self."[58]

Recall that, in his Second Sermon, Gautama could not find the "self" (*ātman*) in phenomena because it was a mark of "substantiality"—either as an ontological fact or as an *upāya*. And while the Buddha would not say one way or the other, it was always possible to argue that this was a denial of the Hindu "Self" within the "chariot" of a human being. That is, until now. We read in the *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* that "A certain wise man in search of immortality, turned his sight inward and saw the Self within." Are not the Buddhists now saying the same thing?

The Bodhisattva Mahāmati actually asked the Lord that question in the *Laṅkāvatara Sūtra*:

> Now the Blessed One makes mention of the Tathāgata-garbha in the sutras, and verily it is described by you as by nature bright and pure, as primarily unspotted, endowed with the thirty-two marks of excellence, hidden in the body of every being like a gem of great value . . . Is not this Tathāgata-garbha taught by the

58 Lopez, "Authority," 22.

> Blessed One the same as the ego-substance [Suzuki's too interpretive translation of *ātman*] taught by the philosophers?

The Lord replied:

> No, Mahāmati, my Tathāgata-garbha is not the same as the [*ātman*] taught by the philosophers; for what the Tathagatas teach is the Tathāgata-garbhas in the sense, Mahāmati, that it is emptiness, reality-limit, Nirvana, being unborn, unqualified, and devoid of will-effort.

In other words, according to this Tathāgatagarbha scripture, traditional teaching has not really changed. Yes, there is new language, but it has a compassionate purpose:

> The doctrine pointing to the Tathāgata-garbha is to make the ignorant cast aside their fear when they listen to the teaching of ["non-self"] and to have them realize the state of non-discrimination and imagelessness.[59]

According to the *Laṅkāvatāra*, therefore, the new teaching is just *upāya* or a "skillful means" to encourage those who might be afraid of the truth of "emptiness."

The *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* is not nearly so cautious; indeed, it throws caution to the winds. Mark Blum translates:

> Good man, "self" is precisely what *tathāgatagarbha* means. All living beings have buddha-nature, and this is what is meant by *this* notion of self. However, the significance of "self" understood in this way has been continuously covered over by an uncountable number of the defilements since the beginning . . ., and that is why living beings have been unable to perceive it.[60]

We could add that it has been covered over by the Buddhist tradition itself—except as we have been able to perceive a "Self" hidden inside its mythology.

The *sūtra* goes on, reminding us of the "Four Distorted Views" that are corrected or inverted in Early Buddhism by the "Three Characteristics" plus the characteristic of impurity: i.e., seeing happiness where there is really suffering, permanence where there is impermanence, seeing self where there is non-self, and purity where there is really impurity. The Lord of the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* says all this is provisionally true but now needs to be "inverted" again:

> The perception of self in what is nonself and the perception of nonself in what is self, these I also call inversions. Worldly people speak of the existence of a self and we also speak of the existence of a self in the Buddha's dharma, but although

[59] Suzuki, *Lankavatara*, 68-69. Translation altered.

[60] Mark L. Blum, trans., *The Nirvana Sutra (Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra)*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai America, 2013), 226. His italics.

> worldly people affirm the existence of self they do not affirm the existence of Buddha-nature. This particular view I call "the perception of self in what is nonself" and this, too, is an inversion. There is a self in the Buddha's dharma but that self is the Buddha-nature.[61]

And the same is true for each of the other Characteristics. This is blatant kataphatic language; and the word "self" in the last sentence should be capitalized. The Lord encourages, "Do not be afraid!"[62]

As we have seen, not all Buddhists agreed with this. In modern times, Matsumoto Shirō—a scholar of Buddhism and a Sōtō Zen priest—really disagrees. He has written an essay whose title, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist," makes his position clear. Thus, he asserts, much of Zen itself is not Buddhist; nor is this author impressed by Vimalakīrti's silence. Instead, that so-called lay "master of the Dharma" should have argued his position—rather than allow to linger the possibility of some transcending "third thing" beyond "empty" opposites, some *dhātu* or "essence" serving as the "primal source of all phenomena" or "existential foundation" (some Truth C).

To Matsumoto, that is all heresy. He writes:

> I wish clearly to reject the idea that Śākyamuni's awakening (and hence Buddhism itself) can be understood in terms of self and existence rather than in terms of no-self and emptiness. For me, the teaching of no-self follows naturally from the notion of *pratītyasamutpāda* [Dependent Origination] to which Śākyamuni was awakened.[63]

The scholar-priest closes his critique with an impassioned appeal:

> For non-Buddhists, none of this is an issue (and indeed for Hindus, the reemergence of *dhātu-vāda* ["following an element"] within the Buddhist tradition might be seen as a fortunate turn of events). But for me, as a Buddhist, there is rather more at stake. Should any of my readers have harbored the notion that the doctrine of *tathāgata-garbha* belongs to the essence of Buddhism . . . I can only plead with them to recognize it as an example of the very thing that Śākyamuni was criticizing and to return to true Buddhist teaching.[64]

This essay appears in a collection entitled, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*; and one writer has remarked that Matsumoto has severely pruned a Tree that is otherwise lush and beautiful.

But that is speaking symbolically. Indeed, I believe Matsumoto has missed the symbolic dimension of religious expression in favor of the philosophic. Had he relied more on language about

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[61] Blum, *Nirvana Sutra*, 225.

[62] Blum, *Nirvana Sutra*, 228.

[63] Matsumoto Shirō, "The Doctrine of *Tathāgata-garbha* Is Not Buddhist," in Hubbard and Swanson, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, 166.

[64] Matsumoto, "Doctrine," 173.

an "Embryo"—a rich symbol with nuance that is hard to pin down—instead of the more discursive or abstract term, "Element," he might have seen that.

In the same collection of essays, Sallie King counters with her own clear title, "The Doctrine of Buddha-nature Is Impeccably Buddhist." She acknowledges that: "Buddha-nature thought uses some of the terminology of essentialist and monistic philosophy, and thus may give the reader the impression that it is essentialist or monistic"—but that is not what the language really intends.[65] Instead, it is all an "experiment." King writes that:

> Buddhism is not nihilistic but, much to the contrary, holds a promise of something of great value that can be discovered through Buddhist practice. Since emptiness language has these negative effects, and since, after all, śūnyavāda is not the Truth but simply an *upāya*, why not experiment with other ways to communicate the Dharma? And since śūnyavāda had pretty well exhausted the *via negativa*, and language, being dualistic, basically offers only negative and positive options, why not experiment with articulating the Dharma in positive language?

We have already heard from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra* that the "Tathāgatagarbha" is not some great new "Truth" but, instead, a compassionate *upāya* or "strategy" to encourage converts. Now we hear from a scholar of Buddhism that "emptiness" itself is "simply an *upāya*" (my own position).

Nevertheless, the "emptiness of self" for this writer (who is also a Buddhist) has priority. She expresses that in the strange equation: "ātmapāramitā=anātmapāramitā=the true, essential nature of all things"—meaning, apparently, that the "essence" of all things and people is the "lack of an essence," the word "self" meaning somehow the "lack of self."

To be fair, King does see something positive: the world "conceived as dynamic, as a series of processes, rather than constructed of entities."[66] It is what makes "life" possible since "plants are processes, not entities, that grow"—the implication being that anything with "substance" or "self" is, by definition, static and lifeless. In this way, King tries putting "leaves" back on Matsumoto's Bodhi Tree. But she is also avoiding the fact that whatever "changes" for Gautama Buddha is by definition "painful."

A Jungian comment Nor is King addressing the age-old philosophical problem of "being and becoming," a pair of opposites that deserve to be harmonized since they, too, are unavoidable. Psychologically, what "becomes" and forever is in "process" is ego consciousness—and one can hope that it is "growing." What has "being," then, is the collective unconscious with its archetypal structures that function as a Foundation for psychic life. If this sounds "essentialist" (something modern thinkers find abhorrent), it is only symbolically so since we cannot be sure that anything we say about the psyche—from within the psyche—is accurate. All we can do, as Jung has said, is "*dream*

[65] Sallie B. King, "The Doctrine of Buddha-Nature Is Impeccably Buddhist," in Hubbard and Swanson, *Pruning the Bodhi Tree*, 174-176.

[66] King, "Impeccably Buddhist," 177.

the myth onwards and give it a modern dress." The composers or compilers of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* were "dreaming onwards" in their own day.

The Similes

Archetype of "Food" Let us do something similar by treating the core images of our *sūtra* as if they were someone's dreams. It is how we treated the standard set of "dreams" found in the mythic Life of the Buddha shortly before his Enlightenment. Three of the *Tathāgatagarbha* similes, then, contain "food" imagery—telling us in different ways what it is like to have a "Buddha within."

1) First, it is like "honey." The Lord teaches in the Grosnick translation:

> Or, good sons, it is like pure honey in a cave or a tree, surrounded and protected by a countless swarm of bees. It may happen that a person comes along who knows some clever techniques. He first gets rid of the bees and takes the honey, and then does as he will with it, eating it or giving it away far and wide. Similarly, good sons, all sentient beings have the tathāgatagarbha. It is like pure honey in a cave or tree, but it is covered by kleśas, which, like a swarm of bees, keep one from getting to it. With my Buddha eye I see it clearly, and with appropriate skillful techniques I expound the dharma, in order to destroy kleśas and reveal the Buddha vision. (97)

Here, the "Tathāgatagarbha"—"Buddhagarbha," "Buddhadhātu"—is like honey hidden in a cave or tree. But we would not know that if the Buddha had not seen it first, then taught us to see it in scriptures using "skillful techniques" like someone skilled at ridding the hive of bees to reach the food. The teaching even has the power, we are told, to "destroy" our *kleśas* likened to bees.

But interpreters have pointed out that the image does not quite work for a Buddhist—since the bees are not just bad but necessary to make the honey, while dislodging the bees is an act of violence, and taking their honey a kind of theft. But, then, the "Buddha" in the scripture may have explained too much, encouraging thinking about the symbol rather than allowing it to have its own "nourishing" effect.

At the risk of saying too much ourselves, Jung has "seen" that the archetypal psyche is not just structural but dynamic, providing libido for conscious living. Therefore, just as the body needs energy from food to survive, so does ego consciousness need energy from the unconscious for its own survival. Jung writes that "it is the 'nourishing' influence of unconscious contents, which maintain the vitality of consciousness by a continual influx of energy; for consciousness does not produce its energy by itself."[67]

"Honey" says that well. It is a prized food since so delicious, so sweet, and it lasts a very long time. The ancients associated it with abundance of life, even immortality. In the Bible, the Promised

[67] Jung, *CW* 9i, par. 248.

Land of Canaan was said to "flow with milk and honey." In the early Church, the newly baptized were offered a cup of milk and honey to express, ritually, entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven.

But the Book of Proverbs warns that "honey" can also be dangerous: "for the lips of a loose woman drip honey" (NRSV, 5:2). It is here that we find honey's "sweetness" associated with inordinate or misplaced desire—introducing ambiguity into the symbolism.

Still, Edinger reminds us of the adage, "The lure of desire is the *sweetness* of fulfillment," and goes on to say that some persons shrink too much from their desires to avoid life's abundance; they need to respond positively to the symbolism of "honey"—should it show up in their psychology.[68] It is even this "Food" archetype that lures us into the world where we find our "sweetheart," whom we call "honey," even after the "honeymoon." And without experiences of that kind—making mistakes along the way and sometimes being "bad" like some honey thief—there can be no increase in consciousness.

Traditional ascetic Buddhism, however, does not encourage that line of association. For it sounds too much like the "savory earth" at the beginning of the aeon that some greedy person tasted—instigating the Buddhist version of the "Fall." We actually read in an early chapter that the suspicious substance was "very sweet, like pure wild honey."

Nevertheless, in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, the Lord wants his "good sons" [and daughters] to see that there is this other "Sweetness within," greater than anything sweet that the external world can offer should one get stuck there. Sujātā offered sweet "food" to Gautama just prior to his breakthrough—special milk-rice that was the "correct thickness, sweetness, and strength." Indeed, it was strong enough to break his attachments to the conventional world even as he returned to the world with his saving message. With that in mind, here are some "nourishing" words from Ralph Waldo Emerson about introversion: "but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude."[69]

> 2) A second "food" image is that of a "kernel of wheat":
>
> Or, good sons, it is like a kernel of wheat that has not yet had its husk removed. Someone who is impoverished might foolishly disdain it, and consider it to be something that should be discarded. But when it is cleaned, the kernel can always be used. In like fashion, . . . I see that the husk of kleśas covers their limitless tathāgata vision. (97)

An "impoverished" person inexplicably does not know that grain needs to be threshed to loosen a hard outer husk—then winnowed in a light wind to separate the edible from the chaff. In other words, the person's "poverty" is ignorance. But the reader is expected to know about cereals and be shocked by the "foolish disdain" of someone who would "discard" such nourishing food. Of course, the point is that everyone tends to undervalue—out of ignorance—the Nourishment that lies within.

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[68] Edinger, *Anatomy*, 90. His italics.

[69] Emerson, "Self-Reliance," 150.

Zimmermann thinks the "common" existence of grain either in the wild or deliberately cultivated is also the point: "It thus seems in this illustration the author wanted to stress the commonness of the fact that buddhaood is found in all living beings (covered by defilements) and the normality of its manifestation"—and that turning cereal to account is itself an "ordinary process."[70] Thus, the Presence of "Buddha-nature" in what is ordinary in Zen—in a stray dog, in a cup of tea.

Jung notes that what is "ordinary" tends to be undervalued by that very fact:

> The immortal being issues from something humble and forgotten, indeed, from a wholly improbable source. . . . The nourishing character of the transformative substance or deity is borne out by numerous cult-legends: Christ is the bread, Osiris the wheat, Mondamin the maize, etc. These symbols coincide with a psychic fact which obviously, from the point of view of consciousness, has the significance merely of something to be assimilated, but whose real nature is overlooked.[71]

And what is "overlooked" is the reality of the psyche, the inner life—apparently not just today in our own culture but ever since humanity has needed religion to remind them otherwise.

Edinger comments that in Western alchemy the "ubiquity" of the First Matter (*prima materia*) symbolizes where psychotherapy can focus to find what is truly important, namely, within the everyday, the petty, what one is inclined to disdain or have already discarded. Analysis is a bit like "threshing" that beats off a rigid ego's outer shell no longer needed for protection. It is like "winnowing" that sorts in the light wind of discussion what is chaff and what is vital to one's own psyche.

3) There is one more "food" image in this scripture:

> Or, good sons, it is like the pit inside a mango fruit which does not decay. When you plant it in the ground, it grows into the largest and most regal of trees. In the same manner, good sons, when I look at sentient beings with my buddha vision, I see that the tathāgatagarbha is surrounded by a husk of ignorance, just as the seeds of a fruit are only found at its core.

The Teacher seems unsure what point to make here: that the mango is another kind of sweet Enlightenment "food;" or that the invisible "pit" at a mango's core is indestructible unlike the soft fruit surrounding it; or that this seed-pit can grow, if planted, into a very large tree—like a Bodhi Tree—bearing many "nourishing" mangoes. The unconscious, of course, is happy to make all these points at once, as it often does in dreams.

Zimmermann chooses the aspect of "growth" and writes:

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70 Zimmermann, *Buddha Within*, 37.

71 Jung, *CW* 9i, par. 248. For additional associations, see my discussion of the Aztec "maize" god Xipe Totec in *The Body*, 70-73.

> Here, at first glance, it is the process of growing, the ripening of the sprout into a "great king of trees," around which the comparison turns. . . . A closer analysis of the wording will show rather that the essential sameness of sprout and full-grown tree, their alternate generation, and the fact that the tree is contained in its complete but not yet fully unfolded form already in the seed go to make up the focus of the simile. In contrast to most of the other similes no act of purification is needed.[72]

This scholar goes on to say that if the "effect is already in the cause" (one kind of Indian causation theory) and "purification" is not required, that gives the dangerous impression that "serious religious practice is irrelevant."[73] Our *sūtra* even leans that way by advising near its close: "If you exert yourselves / And do not spend a lot of time / Sitting in the meditation hall." (101) This suggests the "sudden Enlightenment" side of the Bsam yas debate—although we know that side reached its conclusion "gradually."

Jung's understanding of the Self is similar: an inner core of the psyche that is "Complete" in itself, yet is unconscious, and needs to "grow" into *conscious* completeness. Thus, he writes of "becoming" the personality one has "always been." As to the process itself, Jung goes both ways. It appears to be happening naturally—collectively, as culture—very, very slowly over the millennia. The scripture, however, speaks of planting the mango pit deliberately and not just allowing it to find its way into the soil. Thus, Jung advises that we deliberately participate in the natural process to accelerate a cultural advance—and to give our individual personal lives a larger purpose.

Archetype of "Treasure" The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* uses four images to express the archetypal motif of the "Treasure hard to attain."

> 4) The first example is quite striking:
>
> Or, good sons, it is like genuine gold that has fallen into a pit of waste and been submerged and not seen for years. The pure gold does not decay, yet no one knows that it is there. But suppose there came along someone with supernatural vision, who told people, "Within the impure waste there is a genuine gold trinket [Zimmermann, "gold nugget"]. You should get it out and do with it as you please." Similarly, good sons, the impure waste is your innumerable kleśas. The genuine gold . . . is your tathāgatagarbha. (98)

Here, the "Buddha within" is "genuine gold." That indicates how valuable or precious it is—in part because it is rarely recognized ("no one knows that it is there"). Nor does gold "decay" just as honey does not spoil. And the yellow color of both alludes to the yellow sun and its light—i.e., to the inner Source of Enlightenment. Psychologically, there does seem to be a "Light" of awareness within the unconscious: it "knows" things, yet different in kind from the "light" of consciousness. Since gold is

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[72] Zimmermann, *Buddha Within*, 37-38.
[73] Zimmermann, *Buddha Within*, 81.

solid, the text takes no notice of the problem of "substance" in Buddhism and is not careful to refer to a "process" in the way that the motif of "Food" lent itself. Gold is also beautiful, so now we know wherein lies our own true Beauty—releasing us from being overly concerned with external beauty.

This Gold, however, is hidden in a "pit of waste" (a "shit-pit," Alan Cole translates).[74] And the contrast between gold and shit could not be greater; that the "Buddha" is found there is a disconcerting idea. But this excrement is familiar to Buddhists as the *kleśas* or "defilements" of a human being—if not the human body itself (that "stinking machine made of excrement," as Śāntideva describes it).[75] The unpleasant reference is not far from the "disgusting wilted lotus petals" of our scripture's introduction. So, again, morality is emphasized; and it seems all we need do to reach Solid Gold is to "cleanse" ourselves of greed, hatred, delusion, etc.

In this way, our rather late Mahāyāna text is not that different from Early Buddhism's own emphasis on ethical "purity" —symbolically not that far from the "Golden Buddha" in Bangkok that was hidden behind plaster. In fact, Buddhist commentators often equate what is being revealed here with the "luminous mind" of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*—soiled by "adventitious defilements" that do not really belong to it and that should and can be removed. It sits close to the image of the vowed "Bodhicitta" that acts throughout one's many often-sullied lifetimes like an invisible inner Force for Enlightenment.

About this, Śāntideva is thrilled:

> As a blind man may obtain a jewel in a heap of dust ["dung" is a possible translation], so, somehow, this Thought of Enlightenment has arisen even within me.
> This elixir has originated for the destruction of death in the world. It is the imperishable treasure which alleviates the world's poverty.[76]

Daringly, the *Śrīmālā* says that the Tathāgatagarbha is the "Dharmakāya" within all sentient beings—once it is has been cleaned.[77]

Readers may be familiar with Western alchemy's famous saying that there is "gold in the dung." It led some practitioners of the "Art" to purchase privies and treat the fecal waste found there with chemicals and heat to make actual gold. They failed, of course; but there were fellow practitioners who knew they would. Jung comments:

> There were always a few for whom laboratory work was primarily a matter of symbols and their psychic effect. As the texts show, they were quite conscious of this, to the point of condemning the naïve goldmakers as liars, frauds, and dupes.

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74 Cole, *Text as Father*, 220.
75 Śāntideva, *Entering the Path*, 167.
76 Śāntideva, *Entering the Path*, 155-156.
77 Alex Wayman and Hideko Wayman, trans., *The Lion's Roar of Queen* Śrīmālā*: A Buddhist Scripture on the Tathāgatagarbha Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 98.

> Their own standpoint they proclaimed with propositions like, "*Aurum nostrum non est aurum vulgi*" ["Our gold is not ordinary gold"].[78]

The "extraordinary Gold" they sought, says Jung, was the numinous Self that lies within the depths of the psyche—either as the instigator of individuation or as its goal.

The emphasis in the Buddhist material, however, is on uncovering this Gold by cleansing it of human stain; in the Western material, the emphasis is on making the precious Substance. In fact, it is made from the "dung" itself that is not discarded but called the "Prima Materia" ["first matter"]. Edinger explains:

> Psychologically, this means that the *prima materia* is found in the shadow, that part of the personality that is considered most despicable. Those aspects of ourselves most painful and most humiliating are the very ones to be brought forward and worked on.[79]

Jung remarks about this process: "If I fulfill my pattern, then I can even accept my sinfulness, and can say, 'It is too bad, but it is so—I have to agree with it.' And then I am fulfilled, then the gold begins to glow. You see, people who can agree with themselves are like gold."[80]

> 5) Or, good sons, it is like a store of treasure hidden beneath an impoverished household. The treasure cannot speak and say that it is there, since it isn't conscious of itself and doesn't have a voice. So no one can discover this treasure store. It is just the same with sentient beings. . . . Therefore buddhas appear in the world and reveal to them the dharma store of the tathāgata in their bodies. And they believe in it and accept it and purify their universal wisdom. (98-99)

We have seen this motif twice before, in the *Lotus Sūtra*. The "impoverished" Prodigal Son had no idea that all that wealth of the Rich Man was really his and kept on suffering, almost willfully. Likewise, the man down on his luck did not know there was a precious Jewel sown into his garment and was chided for missing it. A new detail in this "parable" is that the hidden Treasure "isn't conscious of itself and doesn't have a voice"—so as to make itself known.

Here we see the necessity for ego consciousness not only to look for "hidden treasure" but also to give it voice, to express it in some way. Jung wrote in a letter:

> My inner principle is: Deus *et* homo. God needs man in order to become conscious, just as he needs limitation in time and space. Let us therefore be for him limitation in time and space, an earthly tabernacle.[81]

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[78] Jung, *CW* 12, par. 40.
[79] Edinger, *Anatomy of the Psyche*, 12.
[80] Jung, *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra,"* 803.
[81] Jung, *Letters* 1:65-66. His italics.

Buddhism's "impoverished household" is the ignorant ego, not yet aware of its function as an "earthly tabernacle" for the Sacred. That function, when conscious, transforms "poor" egohood into "rich" egohood since it now has some access to archetypal Wisdom. And, as Socrates prayed at the end of the *Phaedrus*: "May I count the wise man only rich."

6, 7) There are two images of hidden "golden statues" that are so close that I will treat them together. The scripture does not identify them as a statues of the Buddha, but we cannot help imagining that to be the case. Let us note that the *Tathāgathagarbha* scripture has to be late enough for anthropomorphic images of the Buddha to exist. Indeed we learn here of the "lost-wax" technique of metal casting. Zimmermann's Tibetan version is the more explicit:

> Sons of good family, again it is like the example of figures of horses, elephants, women or men fashioned out of wax, then encased in clay so that they are completely covered with it and finally, after the clay has dried, melted in fire; and after the wax has been made to drip out, gold is melted. And when the cavity inside the mold is filled with the melted gold, even though all the figures, having cooled down step by step and arrived at a uniform state, are covered with black clay and unsightly outside, their insides are made of gold. Then, when a smith or a smith's apprentice uses a hammer to remove from the figures the outer layer of clay around those figures which he sees have cooled down, then in that moment the golden figures lying inside become completely clean.[82]

The imagery is close to the "removal of a hard husk" covering nourishing grain, of "cleaning" dark dung off shining gold. But it is more elaborate and expresses the creative efforts of culture. We even learn why we need great art—because it shows us what lies within, so we can know our purpose for being here. The beauty of art also points to where Beauty lies.

Then, as if some merchant bought this work of art—and returning now to the Chinese version:

> . . . it is like a man with a statue of pure gold, who was to travel through the narrow roads of another country and feared that he might be victimized and robbed. So he wrapped the statue in worn-out rags so that no one would know that he had it. On the way the man suddenly died, and the golden statue was discarded in an open field. Travelers trampled it and it became totally filthy. But a person with supernatural vision saw that within the worn-out rags there was a pure gold statue, so he unwrapped it and all paid homage to it.

The lesson is what to do when we eventually find the precious Image within the "worn-out rags" of our being—we are to pay "homage" to it. In part, that is to make amends for having trampled on precious values for so long. True, we did not know, but Jung says often that unconsciousness is no real excuse and, indeed, the greatest sin.

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[82] Zimmermann, *Buddha Within*, 140-141. Slightly altered.

Worshippers of the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* sometimes heralded their scripture as a Third Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma, following the First Turning of the Hīnayāna and the Second Turning of the Perfection of Wisdom. But they also knew it would be rejected by those stuck at the doctrines of "non-self" or "emptiness." We hear that in the story of the first preaching of the new doctrine, when countless Bodhisattvas became Buddhas thereby—except for Vajramati (to whom the Lord told this story) and, to our surprise, Mahāsthāmaprāpta, Mañjuśrī, and Avalokiteśvara. (105)

Yet that is also to be expected since, archetypally, there is an initial "Rejection" of what comes next. Much earlier in this book, we watched the Band of Five reject Gautama Buddha himself, and we should not assume that Gautama had an easy time of that experience. Jung confessed that it was not easy to meet with the general incomprehension that he found the psyche as real as the body containing it, that there is a "God-image" within the collective unconscious that we had best acknowledge and obey. In the last year of his life, he wrote sadly in a letter:

> I have to pay tribute to my old age and accept the beatings lying down. I have to understand that I was unable to make the people see what I am after. I am practically alone. There are a few who understand this and that. But almost nobody that sees the whole. . . . I have failed in my foremost task: to open people's eyes to the fact that man has a soul and that there is a buried treasure in the field . . . ."[83]

But, then, the failure is really ours, not his.

Archetype of the "Child" Only one image among the core set of eight directly reflects the scripture's title, "Womb or Embryo of the Tathāgata": namely, that of a "woman pregnant with a son." It is, also, the only one whose main symbol is truly sentient, in the Buddhist sense of not just being alive like a "seed," but conscious. The word, *sattva*, "sentient being," is rendered by Tibetan as *sems can*, "having mind," a clue to what the Sanskrit intends. And while we could say that the "Buddha" sitting inside a lotus—in the introductory "ninth" image—is sentient, he is fully developed. By contrast, a Buddha "embryo" in the "womb" is in a state of developing, a true "Tathāgatagarbha." That contrast fueled the debate over whether or not Enlightenment had only to be seen as already Present or needed to be gradually matured.

The image of pregnancy, then, clearly supports the gradual development of Buddhahood even as it reveals that the potential for this wonderful outcome is already alive within everyone. Here is the text:

> 8) Or, good sons, it is like a woman who is impoverished, vile, ugly, and hated by others, who bears a noble son in her womb. He will become a sage king, a ruler of all the four directions. But she does not know his future history, and constantly thinks of him as a base-born, impoverished child. In like fashion, good sons, the Tathāgata sees that all sentient beings are carried around by the wheel of saṃsāra,

[83] Edward F. Edinger, *Ego and Self: The Old Testament Prophets*, ed. J. Gary Sparks (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000), 149.

> receiving suffering and poison, but their bodies possess the tathāgata's treasure store. Just like that woman, they do not realize this. This is why the Tathāgata everywhere expounds the dharma, saying, "Good sons, do not consider yourselves inferior or base. You all personally possess the buddha nature." (101)

The structure of the story is similar to that of the others: something of great value is hidden inside a disgusting or unlikely place. The motif of "impoverishment" is repeated as a metaphor for ignorance. And the Buddha's teaching of the Dharma is required, yet again, to correct this serious error in perception or attitude.

We seem to have read a version of this story earlier in the "Life" of the Buddha where Gautama's mother, Queen Māyā, was pregnant with a child whose future she did not yet know. Could it be that of a Cakravartin, "ruler of all the four directions," as here, or a Buddha? But, then, we learned that the Buddha became a "Cakravartin" of the spirit. So it is not really awkward that in our current story the "sage king" is a metaphor for "Buddha-nature."

Māyā, however, was perfectly virtuous and extraordinarily beautiful like the goddess Lakṣṃī, loved by all. This mother is "vile, ugly, and hated by others." One has the impression, nevertheless, that the stories belong together and that the earlier auspicious myth is behind this darker image—revealing what happens when the unwitting ego intervenes and distorts a profound truth. This eighth image, then, is our story; and we are all "vile" mothers, yet all "pregnant" with Something "noble" of which we are not aware.

The Tibetan translation emphasizes the dire circumstances. It reports that the woman took up residence in a "poorhouse": "While staying there she had become pregnant"—by "chance," says another version, and no father is ever mentioned. Nor does the mysteriously pregnant woman ever question, says the Tibetan text, "Of what kind is this life that has entered my womb?"[84] Instead, as we heard, she assumes her impoverishment is shared by the Embryo within her—"a base-born, impoverished child." But it is not the case!

As Zimmermann translates:

> Rather thinking herself poor, she would be depressed, and would think thoughts like "I am inferior and weak," and would pass the time staying in the poorhouse as somebody of unsightly complexion and bad smell."

How sad—yet who can trust any of this? We could not trust Gautama when he was twenty-nine and claimed his palace was like a "cemetery" and the dancing women were all "vile." But, then, he was depressed. Buddhism is giving a profound reason why people get depressed or suffer from an inferiority complex: it is because they are ignorant and out of touch with the divine Child growing within them.

Jung dedicated an essay to "The Psychology of the Child Archetype"—a universal image appearing here and in the stories of Romulus and Remus, the Christ Child, Baby Kṛṣṇa, Young Rabbit of the Sioux, etc. He writes:

[84] Zimmermann, *Buddha Within*, 133-136.

> The "child" is born out of the womb of the unconscious, begotten out of the depths of human nature, or rather out of living Nature herself. It is a personification of vital force quite outside the limited range of our conscious mind; of ways and possibilities of which our one-sided conscious mind knows nothing; a wholeness which embraces the very depths of Nature. It represents the strongest, the most ineluctable urge in every being, namely the urge to realize itself. It is, as it were, an incarnation of *the inability to do otherwise* [Jung's italics], equipped with all the powers of nature and instinct, whereas the conscious mind is always getting caught up in its supposed ability to do otherwise. The urge and compulsion to self-realization is a law of nature and thus of invincible power, even though its effect, at the start, is insignificant and improbable.[85]

There is no ethical counsel in this passage—a working hard to rid oneself of "defilements" or the "seven deadly sins"—just as there is none in the Buddhist image of the "pregnant woman." Instead, the emphasis is upon knowing a splendid truth and allowing it to unfold naturally. In fact, Jung says it will "unfold"—even against our will—since it is the "strongest, the most ineluctable urge" in every being.

We might seek a proper balance, nevertheless, between getting out of the way of our "Embryo" and making some effort on its behalf—by providing it, shall we say, with a proper diet of Honey and nourishing Grain; preparing for its future by cleaning Gold and digging up mislaid Treasure; by honoring Images of what it will become after its eventual Birth. This is a symbolic way of saying that we can cultivate an appreciation for the power of religious symbolism itself—"living the symbolic life," as Edinger puts it.[86]

That, I believe, is the most important lesson of this new scripture and its images—as it is of the *Lotus* with its parables and the *Vimalakīrti* with its fantasy. It explains why the Lord of this text claims that even if one worships countless Buddhas in their Pure Lands throughout the universe and honors them with "fifty times more jeweled stūpas than there are sands in the Ganges River"—

> O Vajramati, that bodhisattva would still not be the equal of the person who finds joy and enlightenment in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, who accepts it, recites, copies it, or even reveres but a single one of its metaphors." (103)

We have several from which to choose.

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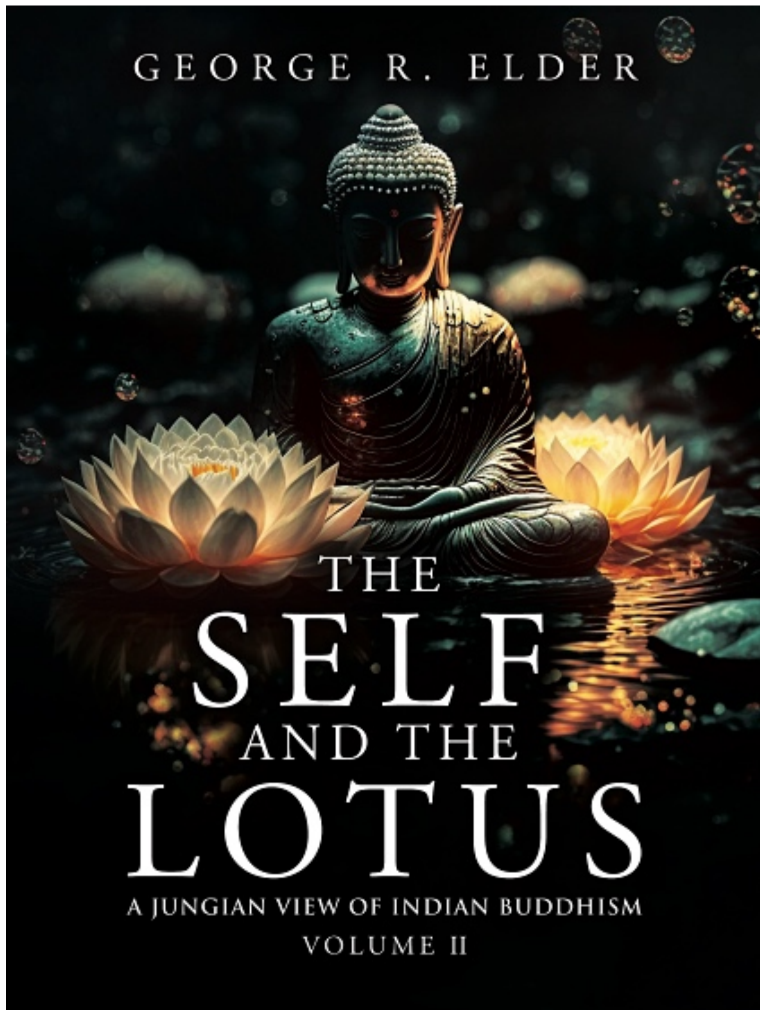
[85] Jung, *CW* 9i, par. 289.

[86] Edinger, *Ego and Archetype*, 117-130.



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